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Sierra Life

THE MAGAZINE OF THE HIGH SIERRA

The STEVE McKINNEY Story • The HIGH ROUTE by DOUG ROBINSON
The GREAT INYO EARTHQUAKE of 1872
DEATH VALLEY & THE AMARGOSA • AMERICAN DIPPER

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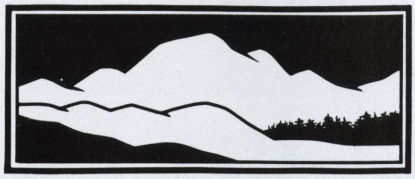

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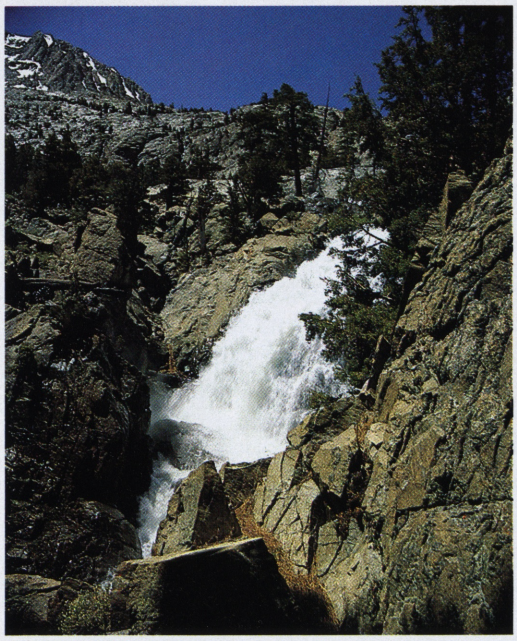

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FROM THE PUBLISHER

I did it! I finally learned to ski! Can you believe it? *Trip on the carpet* Pramann learned to ski.

It was difficult to admit that I didn't ski. "WHAT??? You've lived in the Sierra for twenty years, and YOU DON'T SKI???" I was tired of feeling like a recreational outcast. I had no choice. I *had* to learn.

My sister-in-law, Judith, had been begging me for weeks to take a ski lesson with her. Against my better judgement (I have enough trouble trying to publish this magazine, I don't need broken arms and legs too), I agreed to go with her.

Now, you must understand, Judith does everything better than I do. She even "works out." She actually exercises and lifts weights and rides a mountain bike. I do things like read and drink diet Coke. My hobby is staying "out" of shape.

My children said, "Don't do it Mom, you'll kill yourself." Judith said, "Come on, let's go."

We headed for Mammoth Mountain. This was my second attempt at skiing. Back in 1984, I made my famous *Bun Run* down the mountain. I didn't tell Judith about that trip.

The ski instructor showed us "how easy it is to ski " and then put us on the chair. "I could fall out of the chair and save myself the humiliation of another *Bun Run*," I thought to myself. Too late. We were at the top

I tried to remember everything the instructor had said — it worked! I skied down the mountain like a pro. Judith crashed and burned. I couldn't believe it! I didn't fall, and Judith did . . . several times. Okay. So it was only Sesame Street. But, I didn't fall, and Judith did . . . several times.

I called Judith the following week. "Are you ready for our next ski lesson," I innocently asked. "!%*& you, Pramann," she said. Click.

Guess I'll have to find a new ski partner next winter.

Sandie Pramann
Publisher

LETTERS

Earth to Bishop:
Seeking info on *Sierra Life*, missing since last summer. Age 6, 8 1/2"x 11" in size, good-natured, socially conscious, friendly and likely to go with strangers. Mom, Pop, Kids and Cat worried. Please report any sightings to undersigned.

Cynthia Woo
San Francisco, California

Ed. Just when you thought it was safe to go back to your mailbox . . . poof, here we are again! Thanks for missing us. Our readers are the most wonderful people on Earth. Thanks for hanging in there with us while we strive for regularity!

Dear Friends,
While traveling through Lone Pine and Bishop, I purchased the July/August 1986 issue of your magazine. (Hop Along Cassidy is on the cover). I really enjoyed the cover story!
Thank you, and keep up the fine work!

Robert Biszek
Allentown, Pennsylvania

Editor:
It's so refreshing to see my beautiful homeland not only in your fantastic photos, but the factual and well written articles. Congratulations on a job more than well done.

Pat Houser-Flynn
Placentia, California

Editor:
It was with great pleasure that I recently discovered your magazine. The Sierra is a special place: it deserves a quality publication like yours.

Michael Frye
Yosemite, California

Editor:
All the Chamber Board members and the office staff, say "A OKAY" for the super article on Lone Pine. Jim Mitchell's article is excellent. As a matter of fact, the whole issue is great.

Helen Hoffman
Lone Pine Chamber of Commerce

Ed: Thank you Lone Pine Chamber of Commerce! And, our thanks to all who advertise through us . . . you make Sierra Life possible.

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Doug Robinson
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ART & PHOTOGRAPHY

Art Director
Ilene Kerr
Photographers
Gordon Wiltsie
John Stow
Michael Pope

PRODUCTION

Manager
Earl Robinson

ADVERTISING & MARKETING

Director
Mike Martell
699 West Line Street
Bishop, California 93514

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Sierra Life

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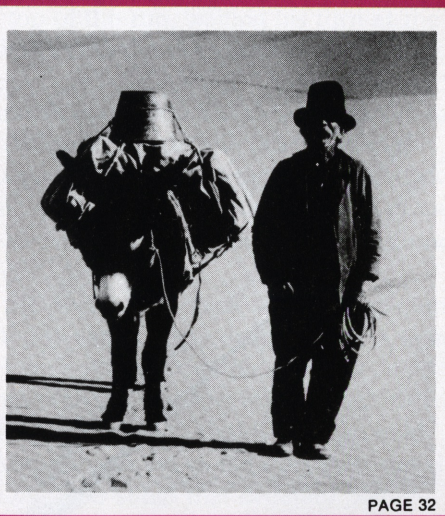

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The first east to west crossing of the High Sierra in a hot air balloon.
Photo by Tom Nagashima, Bishop, California

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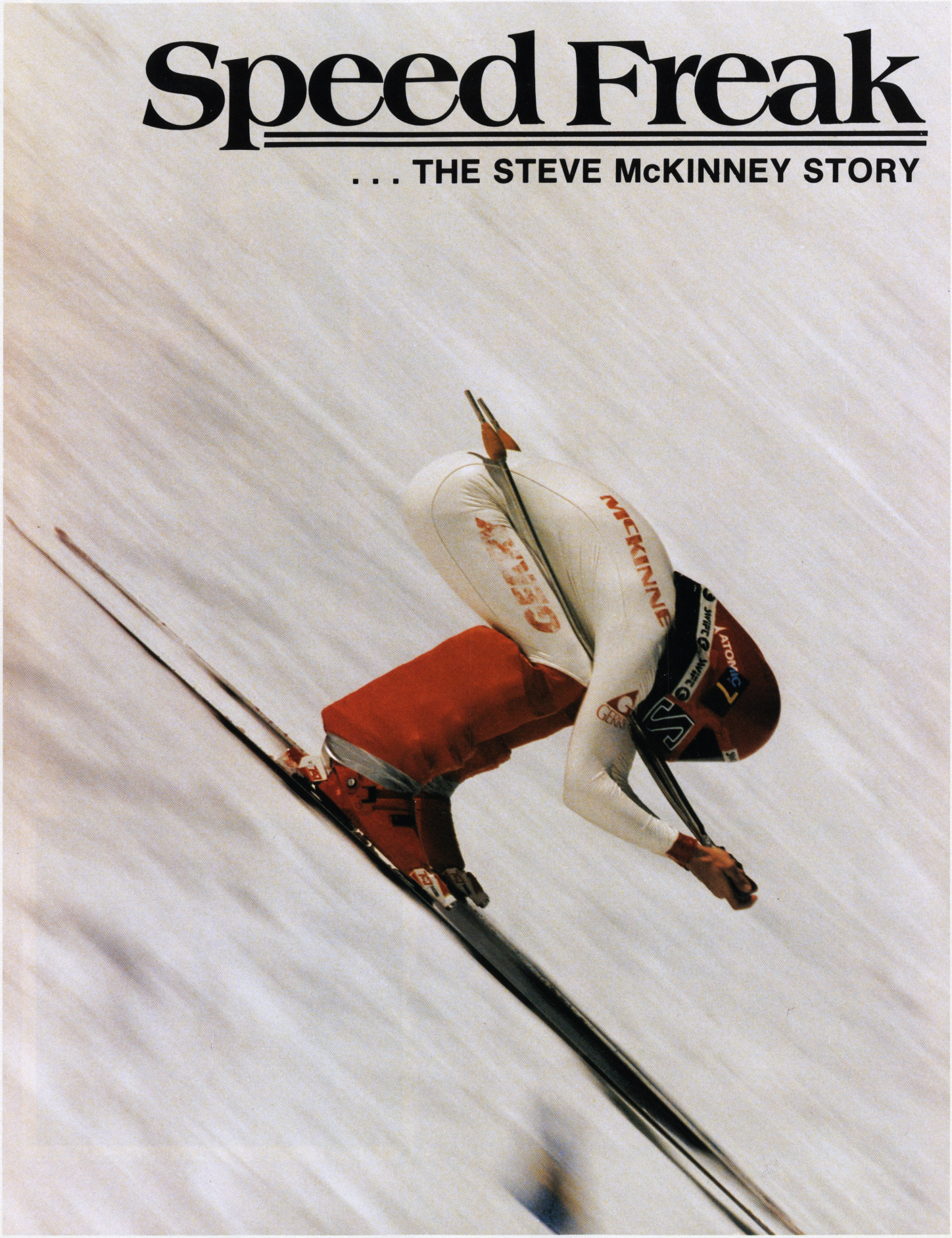

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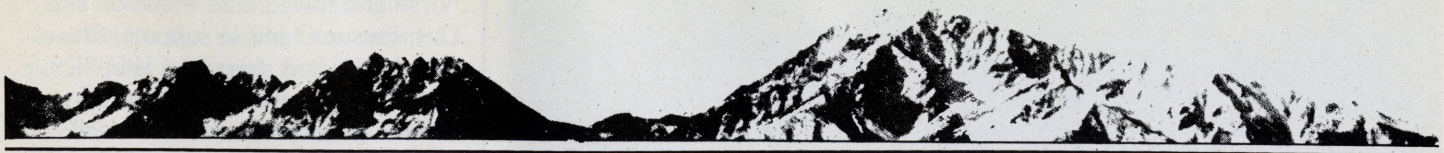

SIERRA PROFILE

By Steve Boga

CERVINIA, ITALY, 1974, Day 1: Two 20-year-old Americans strolled into a small town on the Swiss border. They were there, in the shadow of Matterhorn, to ski the Kilometer Lanciato, A.K.A. the K.L., the Flying Kilometer, the World Series of Speed Skiing. People stopped and stared, drawn not by the Americans' reputations, for they had none, but by their beards, blue jeans and below-shoulder-length blond hair, which contrasted sharply with the trim sartorial elegance of the European racers. The people pointed and called them "hip-pies." After the week of racing was over, they would be calling them "The Yankee Flyers." In their hometown of Squaw Valley, California, they were called Steve McKinney and Tom Simons.

SQUAW VALLEY, CALIFORNIA, 1986: McKinney, his 6'2", 190 pound body sprawled on the couch in his Squaw Valley home, remembers that time. "We lacked the heavy 240 centimeter skis, the sleek aerodynamic helmets and the nonporous skintight rubberized suits employed by world-class speed skiers. We were skiers all right — had been since childhood — but our specialty was the downhill, where top speeds were less than 90 miles per hour. Alessandro Casse's world speed record, set at Cervinia, was 114.47 mph.

"When I started skiing, I quickly gravitated toward the fastest downhill courses, then the fastest sections of the fastest downhill courses. But I got impatient with turns; without enough speed I was bored.

He'd come to the right place — there were no turns at Cervinia. The eight meter wide track ran straight down the face of a glacier. About 500 meters from the start, the skier passed through an infrared timing light; a hundred meters (and less than two seconds!) later, he passed through a second timing light. If he fell or failed to finish within 5% of the leader's time, he was eliminated. As the days went on, the starting point was moved higher up the mountain.

A speed skiing race consists of three phases: the start, the tuck, the finish.

Whether it's speed skiing or an alpine run, the start is the same. From a standstill, the racer first poles, then skates to attain maximum speed quickly.

The tuck is where the race is won or lost. "The chest should be on the knees," says McKinney, "so the wind doesn't hit it and force the body up. The arms are in front, breaking the air for the body. The head is tucked low — but not too low, as the eyes must be able to see. Even though you are traveling fast, the overall effect should be stillness. As an old Zen saying advises — non-action within action."

But stopping is the problem, especially at Cervinia. The glacier has receded, thus the bottom of the run is very steep, and the transition from 'Go' to 'Stop' is abrupt. It changes from a 67 degree downhill to 15 yards of level to a 12 degree uphill, and has the force of 3G's — three times the force of gravity — a force that, McKinney says, "wants to put you on the tails of your skis."

Or as retired speed skier Dick Dorworth put it: "It's a transition that would like to suck you down, break you into a million pieces and spit you out in China."

CERVINIA, ITALY, 1974, Day 2: Steve McKinney stood near the top of the run, waiting his turn at the mountain. He was wearing a borrowed red-and-black stretch suit and a borrowed helmet. He was the third to go, behind a Finnish boy and a Swiss skier named Jean Marc Beguelin. While he waited, he did breathing exercises and yoga stretches. Nearby, a Japanese skier did Tai Chi while an Italian crossed himself and prayed silently. Whatever works, thought McKinney. Calmness equals emptiness . . .

A push with the poles, four quick skating steps, and the Finn was off. He immediately dropped into a knee-to-chest tuck, then, so steep was the slope, he disappeared from McKinney's view for most of the run. So steep was the slope, in fact, that if a skier could stand vertically on the run, he would be able to reach out and touch snow. So steep that ordinary people, when first laying eyes on it, invariably mumbled obscenities, then retreated to the nearest bar.

Thus far, for McKinney and Simons, the early runs — 70, 80, 90 miles per hour — had been easy. But today they'd hit 100, and with a low-lying fog to boot.

Beguelin pushed off, dropped into a tuck and disappeared from view. While McKinney, eyes closed, imagined his own perfect run, Beguelin ran into trouble. In a lower tuck than usual, he lost sight of the track, veered blindly off course, crashed into a timing apparatus which nearly ripped him in half, then soared off a cliff and landed on an ice field.

SQUAW VALLEY, CALIFORNIA, 1986: "I've often questioned why I wasn't more broken up over Beguelin's death," says McKinney. "Was I that callous a person? No, I think it was a matter of concentration, which is vital in speed skiing. I had my own task to perform, and only by concentrating on that was I going to be able to prevent the mistakes Beguelin had made. That was the way I viewed it."

Such a view was prerequisite to success. McKinney won the Flying Kilometer (Simons was 2nd) in a time of

McKinney on summit of Mustagh Alta, 25,000 feet.

117.5 mph, the first of his five world records.

Steve McKinney was raised in the ultimate skiing family. Seven kids, seven skiers, though it began at least two generations earlier than that. Steve's mother, Frances, has a photograph of her mother soaring off the ski jump at Lake Placid — in a skirt!

Steve's parents were divorced when Steve was five, and Frances raised the seven kids. "A strong woman," says Steve. "She had very definite ideas about the importance of physical and mental balance for good health. Besides mother and teacher, she was athletic director." The McKinney kids, shuttled between their Kentucky horse farm and Lake Tahoe house, became as proficient on a horse as on a pair of skis. Frances turned their Nevada home into a ski school, then pressured the Governor for a license to legalize the fact. Thus, the McKinney home became the Ponderosa Day School.

Steve speaks proudly of his mother: "She was a pioneer. The ski academies, where students ski half-time, study half-time — she originated that format."

Besides Mom, Steve's three older sisters also loomed large in his development as a skier. His earliest memories were of skijouring, in which one of his sisters rode a horse and towed little Steve on skis. Despite such familial support, Steve feels he started skiing too late. "I was six," he says, "but Tamara was on skis as soon as she could walk."

Tamara McKinney, Steve's 24 year-old sister, also lives in Squaw Valley. She is a downhill skier, who is famous for winning the silver medal at the 1984 Olympics. Tamara is an amateur skier who, because of endorsements, makes ten times as much money as her professional brother.

"Yeah, it's funny," says Steve with no trace of bitterness. "I make $20,000 to $50,000 if I set a world record, but Tamara makes $200,000. She also gets about a hundred times as many fan letters."

Despite their skiing accomplishments, Tamara and Steve agree that the most talented McKinney was sister Sheila. "She was the best of us all," Steve says sadly, "But during a World Cup race she released from her bindings and hit a lift tower. She was in a coma for 18 days. She's doing all right now, but there's still motor problems. She doesn't ski. She could, but she won't do it unless she can do it really well." Steve smiles. "Like all of us in this family."

Steve McKinney grew up fast and hard. By the time he was 14, he was raising a little hell, but he was also well on his way to developing what race doctor Zilioli Lanzini would later call a "terrifying physique." About that time, he decided to devote himself to the pursuit of excellence. Or, as he put it, "I cut my hair and began to concentrate on the ski-racing gig." Showing his characteristic drive, he made the U.S. Ski Team by the time he was eighteen.

McKinney and Simons, who was also on the team, skied well enough, but the discipline demanded of potential Olympians chafed them. The coaches drew lines and they regularly crossed them, which qualified them as "discipline problems."

"We couldn't figure out," Simons would often say, "why we had to have a Marine haircut to race for the U.S."

McKinney was the first to quit. Just before the World Cup race, he packed his backpack and hitched to San Francisco, then caught a boat to Alaska. As he remembers, "I was full of idealistic visions of cabins in the woods and self-sufficiency, but two weeks of rain drove me bats. I began to miss the spring skiing at Squaw Valley and thought, 'What am I doing here?' When I got no answer, I returned to California and took up rock climbing."

BLACK WALL, DONNER PASS, CALIFORNIA, 1973: Neophyte climber Steve McKinney shielded his eyes from the granite glare and squinted down at his partner, Craig Calonica, who was perched on a narrow ledge twenty feet below.

"Hairy and scary," Calonica called up to him, but McKinney was already climbing, pulling himself up the sheer granite rock, his huge hands finding holds where none seemed to exist. What he lacked in technique, he made up for in strength and instinct. He had taken to the sport naturally, perhaps too naturally . . .

Eight feet from a ledge, he hesitated, reached up, missed and fell. Calonica couldn't believe how fast he dropped — forty feet in an instant, hitting a ledge with a sickening thud, bouncing off, then stopping two feet from another ledge when the rope finally went taut. His back was broken.

So upbeat is McKinney's attitude that he can now speak of *The Fall* only in positive terms. "My speed skiing career dates from that accident," he says. "I could walk, but I was encased in a neck-to-crotch body cast. Since I couldn't participate in the U.S. Ski Team's summer training camps, I decided to go to Cervinia, where I'd heard about a race with speeds twice what I was used to."

The Italians had long dominated the Cervinia race, and that year was no exception. McKinney watched Alessandro Casse increase his own unmotorized land speed record to 114.47 mph. Of far greater importance to the sport, however, was the fact that McKinney himself skied the Plateau Rosa Glacier — in a body cast!

McKinney broke the World Record in 1978 at Cervinia, Italy.

"The cast taught me proper technique. It held my upper body rigid. I couldn't use it to power me, so I was forced to rely solely on my legs and ski only with my knees — technically perfect. I learned to ski quietly, my body riding smooth and balanced."

The accident, McKinney maintains, affected more than just his skiing. "It altered my personality, my entire approach to life. It's possible that breaking my back may have opened chakras — energy valves in the body. Before that injury I was a very macho kind of guy. But afterwards, I started to develop a softer touch, a sensitivity. I learned finesse. It went way beyond sports."

According to McKinney, speed skiing was one of the original racing modes. "For hundreds of years in Scandanavia they've climbed up hills and speed-skied for the purse or the girl." But the sport didn't reach America until 1880, when Tommy Todd won a race organized by the legendary Snowshoe Thompson in an unbelievable time of 88 mph.

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became a match play event between two Italians: Olympics downhill champion, Zeno Colo, and his archrival, Rolando Zanni. By 1947, Colo, helmetless and dressed in a woolen sweater, had improved the record to 99.5 mph.

There the record stood until 1959 when the 100 mph mark was finally broken. Except for a brief period in the 1960's when the Japanese did well, it remained an Italian event until 1974 when the Americans came to town.

What's it like to be flashing down an icy ski slope at 120 plus mph? The mind gropes for comparisons . .

The automobile speed limit is 55 mph.

The fastest speed ever recorded in an Olympic downhill race is 64 mph.

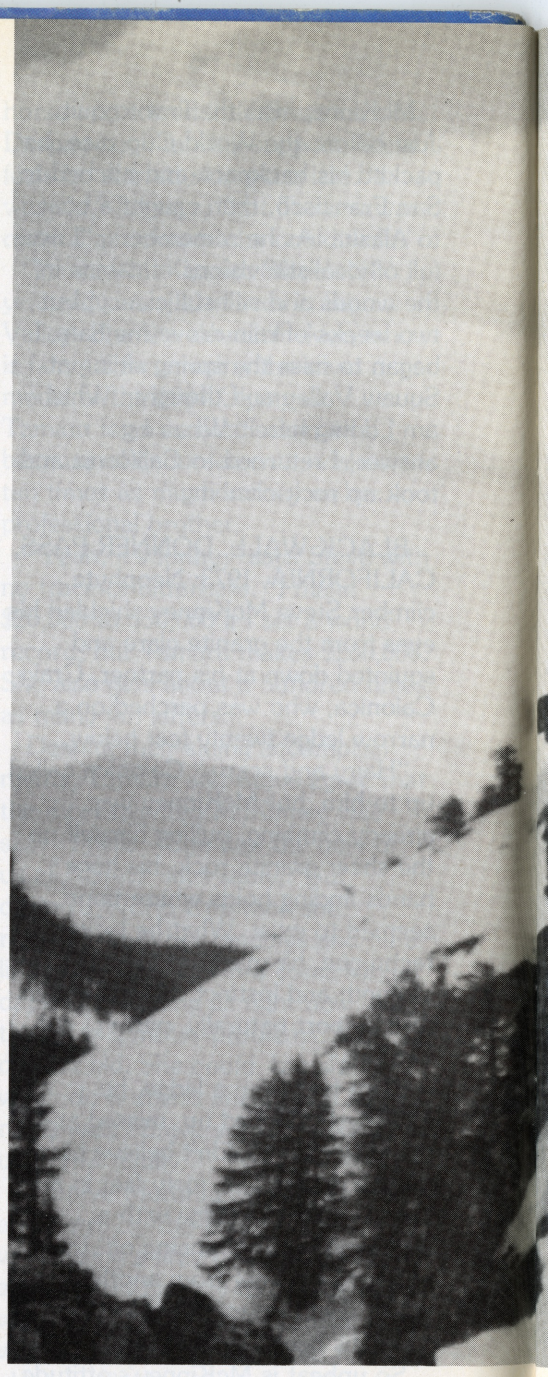
A skydiver free-falls at between 117-125 mph.

Yes, but what's it really like?

"It's more like the peregrine falcon," says McKinney, returning to his couch with a beer. "That's what we're really like, flying down the mountain on a cushion of air. Falcons have been clocked at around 175 mph . . ." He smiles devilishly. ". . . That's a reasonable goal."

When McKinney talks about speed, his voice rises and he licks his lips as though he can taste it. "You push off — skate, skate, skate — then drop into a tight tuck that you have to hold without movement. Even a finger can throw you off. Early on, there's no air resistance, and the normal perceptions are there — the rush of wind, flags here, a rock there. But then you start going faster — 70, 80, 90 — and now everything is vibrating. You get above a hundred and it's vibrating very fast! You hit that extreme speed, and boom! Suddenly there is no sound, no vision, no vibration. At the crescendo of speed, there is no thought at all."

His explanation for that phenomenon is a combination of Eastern spiritualism, Western hedonism and Einstein's Theory of Relativity.



"As an object approaches the speed of light," he says, "Its internal time clock slows down. An astronaut launched into space will age more slowly than his twin brother back on earth. The same is true for the mind of the speed skier. The faster my body goes, the slower my mind works. It's like that White Light place in the Tibetan Book of the Dead. At high speed your senses blend together. You come from separateness and enter into oneness, oneness with the mountain, your skis, everything. In that place you're fully in the moment. No worries about the past or the future, only the Here and

McKinney skis Squaw Valley with sister Tamara. *Chaco Mohler Photography*

Now. Being in those other places saps your energy."

On other occasions, McKinney has said, "Speed — the sensation, not the drug — is very sensual. I'll know it's time to quit when I find myself doing it for some other motive other than sensuality. It's a healthy, beautiful way to cleanse my system, to give me a new outlook — like a cold bath."

But what of fear? Isn't it scary skiing that fast? Don't speed skiers worry about dying?

McKinney laughs defiantly. "Fear is always trying to grab you; when you outwit it on the run, it sure feels good. I'm not going to shelter myself from experiences I should have. Seems to me there's no better example of not being here now than worrying about dying then."

Tom Simons, who is back on the circuit after a 3-year layoff, has said, "I want to live, there's no doubt of that. But without my philosophy of thinking that it's not so bad to die, I couldn't do what I do. Every racer knows his life is on the line."

"That's true," says McKinney. "We value our lives. I take every precaution to protect mine — except stay at home."

McKinney, rising from the couch to get another beer, adds, "I'm more likely to feel fear after the run. As in, *Holy shit, I skied down that!*"

The present speed skiing world record holder, Franz Weber, has said, "I'm always afraid. Fear dominates this sport. I must constantly strive to overcome fear, to master it."

McKinney, however, gives the impression that he is successful not because he rides roughshod over fear, but because he transforms it, from a negative emotion into a positive one. Through sublimation, he uses fear to shove him faster and faster down the mountain.

"When you feel that fear," McKinney says, "Its an amazing adrenaline rush. And adrenaline is

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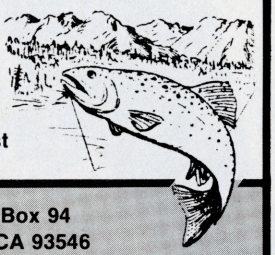

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the fight or flight drug, isn't it? Well, in speed skiing we have to do both."

Although Italian Pino Meyner won the 1975 K.L., McKinney and Simons finished second and third, while another American, Paul Buschmann, was fifth. The following year Simons won and McKinney finished 2nd. ABC came to Italy to film the event and the ratings were good. But in 1977, the race was canceled at the last minute, which soured the network on further telecasts.

"The reasons for canceling the race were bogus," McKinney says. "The Italian officials told us it was because avalanches had destroyed the course, but the real reason was that the Italians were tired of sponsoring a race in which their countrymen had no chance to win. We started to repair the track ourselves, but the bastards brought in snow cats in the middle of the night and destroyed it for real."

"The reasons for canceling the race were bogus . . . they told us it was because avalanches had destroyed the course, but the real reason was that the Italians were tired of sponsoring a race in which their countrymen had no chance to win."

In protest, a small nucleus of the best American and European racers traveled to Portillo, Chile, where they founded a world-class track and organized a race. McKinney won that race, breaking the world record by one kph (although it was never officially recognized), and thus began a strong populist movement in the sport.

As McKinney says, "The biggest outcome of that canceled race was that the racers finally began to take control of their own destiny. Before, it had been a bunch of old men running the show, saying 'go, go, go,' even when conditions were dangerous."

Furthermore, McKinney asserts, the Portillo track is much safer than the one in Cervinia. "The Andes are shaped differently than the Alps. In Chile the steepest part is at the top, gradually flattening below. You don't get the radical compression that exists at the finish of the Cervinia track."

In 1978 the racer's conflicts with the Italian officials intensified. Although the race was run, the atmosphere was tense. Once again McKinney won the K.L., and his time of 198.02 kph was tantalizingly close to the magic 200 mark. He could have run again, but he declined.

"I could feel 200 in me," he explains, "But I was damned if I was going to break it in Italy. I told the ski companies: You want 200? Sponsor our race in Chile and you'll get 200."

So Steve McKinney — the salesman — convinced the racers, the ski companies, the officials and the Longine timing people to go to Chile. It would have been just another letdown story, except that Steve McKinney — the skier — was true to his word, breaking 200 kph, speed skiing's equivalent to the four-minute mile.

Like Babe Ruth calling his home-run, or Bill Johnson his gold medal, or Cassius Clay his knockout, McKinney had done what he said he would do. And while the world may not always love the self-possessed winner, it cannot ignore him. The event was front page news in South America and a big story in Europe, bringing McKinney some fame and money. For the first time in his life he could make a living at his sport.

Steve McKinney's impact on speed skiing has been enormous. Besides racer, salesman and ambassador, he is equipment designer. He reshaped the helmet used by world-class speed skiers.

"In this sport we need more than just head protection," McKinney explains. "We need aerodynamic advantages. A stabilizing effect at high speeds. I spent a week with an Italian manufacturer, making clay molds, and came up with something between an eagle's head and a trout's head. It works."

McKinney also revolutionized the tuck. "Simons and I discovered," McKinney says, "that if we stuck

our butt up a little, it created the sort of stability that you get from a fastback car. We could catch an air stream that actually pushed us forward. Of course, there's a risk. A headfirst fall is the worst for a skier."

McKinney is thinking of a time when a skier named Walter Mussner took just such a fall. He was going over 100 mph, when he tumbled head over skis, leaving sixteen holes in the snow and ripping himself open from mouth to pelvis. He came to a stop at the feet of American speed skier, Dick Dorworth. Mussner was dead and Dorworth never raced again.

McKinney has only fallen once. Although he wasn't seriously hurt, he has not forgotten the experience. "I don't wear gloves — the better to feel my way through the invisible tunnel — and when I fell, I instinctively put my hands down in the snow to break my fall. It was like putting them on a hot stove."

"A skier who falls at 100 plus mph runs another risk as well. His rubberized suit can melt from the friction and cauterize a wound leaving a nasty scar. . . Sorta like napalm."

A skier who falls at 100 plus mph runs another risk as well. His rubberized racing suit can melt from the friction and cauterize a wound, leaving a nasty scar. "Sorta like napalm," says Simons.

Fame has brought McKinney invitations to several "Survival of the Fittest" competitions.

"Everything from white water swims to repelling off tallis slopes," he says. "The crazy stuff we do for money. I usually finish in the middle of the pack, collect my thousand or two, and go home."

"My favorite competition was one called the M.V.P. — Most Versatile Performer. I was up against John Riggins and Steve Grogan and about twenty other guys. We did everything from golf to something called Devil Take the Hindmost. But the best part was getting drunk in the bar with Riggins when it was over."

McKinney is reminded of the times he appeared on the TV quiz program, *To Tell The Truth*. "The first time I pretended to be a guy who makes and pirates satellite dishes. I fooled Kitty Carlisle, who, when she picked me, said, 'He just looks like a pirate.' Second time I played myself and fooled nobody." McKinney finishes his beer and rises to get another. "Which proves that I look more like a skier than a pirate, eh?"

McKinney had long believed that the U.S. should have one of the fastest speed skiing courses in the world. Quite naturally, the burden of discovery fell upon him. He skied all over the Rockies, searching for a run with world-class potential, finally finding one in the remote backcountry near Silverton, Colorado. Once more the salesman, he convinced R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company to put up the $90,000 needed for avalanche control, and by 1982 a track was established that was indeed world-class. That year at Silverton, Austrian Franz Weber upped the world record to 126 mph; McKinney was 2nd at 125.7.

In 1983 McKinney faced a tough decision: Whether to return to Silverton and attempt to regain his title, or to take advantage of a rare opportunity and join an expedition that was out to summit Mt. Everest without the aid of oxygen. In choosing Everest, he said "I figured there'd be other chances to break the record, but I wasn't sure I'd have another shot at Everest."

It would seem, from the record, that things could not have turned out worse for McKinney. But his eyes see only the silver linings, and he has never regretted his decision.

The Silverton course that year was, in Steve's own words, "faster than shit." Franz Weber shattered the world record with a time of 129.1 mph, and Paul Buschmann was 2nd at 127 mph.

Meanwhile on Everest, the action

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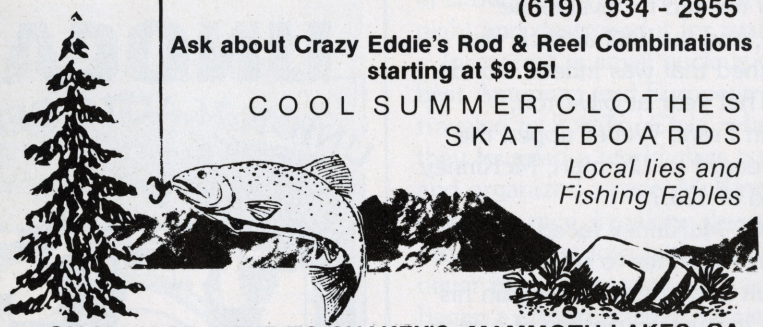
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The story is told of a McKinney run a few years ago in which he demonstrated just such strength. As he neared the first timing light, one of his huge, heavy skis flew up, causing him to lurch dangerously in the wind. Where others surely would have fallen, McKinney was able to force his errant ski back down to the snow, right himself and finish the race.

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THE AMERICAN DIPPER

Muir's Favorite Songbird

Text and photos
by Mike McWherter

*The waterfalls of the Sierra are frequented by only one bird—the Ouzel or Water Thrush (*Cinclus Mexicanus*). He is a singularly joyous and lovable little fellow, about the size of a robin, clad in a plain waterproof suit of bluish gray, with a tinge of chocolate on the head and shoulders. In form he is about as smoothly plump and compact as a pebble that has been whirled in a pot-hole, the flowing contour of his body being interrupted only by his strong feet and bill, the crisp wing-tips, and the upslanted wren-like tail.*

John Muir—The Mountains of California, 1892.

Spring runoff had peaked and the tumbling white water roared continuously along lower Rock Creek in the High Sierra. In the middle of the stream I noticed a small dark bird, an ouzel, perched atop a rock. It was engaged in a peculiar up-and-down bobbing motion, a kind of jerking motion in which it alternated from a standing to a squatting position and back again. This bobbing or dipping action (measured at 40 to 60 bobs each minute) has given rise to the Ouzel's more descriptive names: "American dipper" and "Teeter Bird."

I followed the bird up the rushing stream, past many waterfalls, and caught sight of it hopping along a rock over which some shallow fast-moving water flowed. Working its way upstream, from submerged rock to submerged rock, it poked its head into the shallow water, searching with its pointed beak for insects hiding in rock crevices. The long slender beaks of dippers are well-suited to reach hiding insects and their larvae which live in the oxygen rich water. The dipper seemed unconcerned about my presence and went intently about its work. Then, as if I had approached too close, it again flew off in a whirr, landing a short distance upstream on a rock.

Although it has been suggested that the name dipper may refer to the fact that they are forever "dipping" in the water, many other aquatic birds also "dip." The name more accurately describes its unique up and down bobbing behavior.

One explanation for the bird's distinctive movement takes into consideration the roar of ever-present waterfalls and the dipper's dark protective coloring. The dipper's call is often inaudible near waterfalls, and their coloring makes them inconspicuous among the shadows of large rocks. It has been suggested that the dipping motion may offer some form of visual communication by drawing the attention of a mate, or when used by the young, the attention of their parents.

Although the dipper family, *Cinclidae*, is found in many of the world's great mountain ranges it consists of only one genus, *Cinclus*, with four species. Dippers found in the Sierra Nevada, *Cinclus mexicanus*, are the North American variety and live in the range's conifer belt from 2,000 to 11,000 feet—always near clear, cold,

fast-moving mountain streams. More generally, North American dippers are found from the Aleutian Islands south to southern California, and through the highlands of Mexico to western Panama.

The other three dipper species are found in the mountains of Europe, the Himalaya, and the Andes. All dipper species have very similar habits and differ slightly in size and color of plumage. They are the only songbirds that feed entirely in mountain waters.

Proceeding head-on into the rushing current, dippers swim underwater by using short powerfully built pointed wings. Both wings and tail help maintain control in the fast-moving water. In calmer waters, such as the shallow edges of lakes, dippers have been seen completely submerged and walking about in pursuit of food. When the need arises, they can suddenly burst out of the water and become airborne. Yet, despite all this activity in cold water — even in freezing temperatures of winter — the dipper is kept warm and dry by a thick undercoat of down. The outer plumage is a superior repeller of water, being thoroughly waterproofed by oil from a preen gland that is ten times larger than that of any other songbird.

Dippers do not migrate but remain on a particular stream as long as a vigorous flow exists to support the aquatic insect life upon which they depend. When streams dry up, dippers move to lower elevations where they find open water again. If they are seen near still water, it is generally the lakes directly above or below their home streams.

Despite their aquatic habits, the feet of dippers lack webbing and are ill-suited for swimming in placid pools of water or along lake surfaces. But what the dipper's feet lack in swimming ability is compensated for by their ability to cling to the surfaces of rocks submerged under swiftly moving water. The perching or grasping ability of the dipper's feet is useful in a world where clinging is more important than swimming.

Except at breeding time and when caring for the young, dippers are solitary birds. Pairs establish a territory which they will defend against other dippers. A large globular nest, about one foot in diameter, is constructed from mossy materials and is often located on a ledge close to a waterfall. Mist from the tumbling water keeps the nest moist on the outside. Inside, the nest is lined with dry leaves and moss. Three to six eggs are layed and hatch about 16 days later. The young remain in the nest until they fledge about 25 days later.

Dippers sing at their peak in spring when mountain streams are in flood. Their song is likewise at its lowest in winter when the streams are at their ebb. But as long as there is free flowing water, dippers will sing. □

Above, the Dipper looks for "dinner" from a rock. Below, he goes after it with the speed of lightning.

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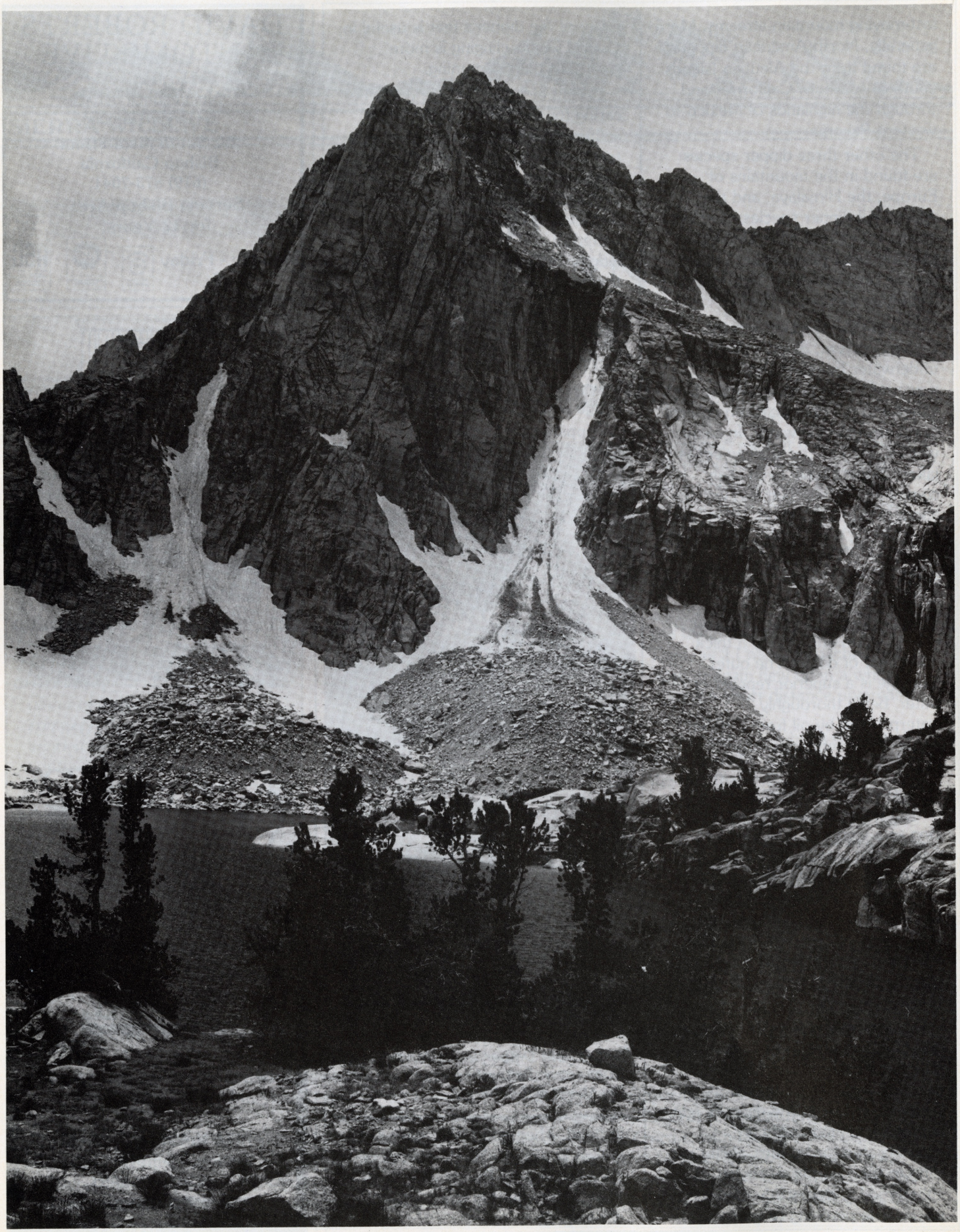


Hungry Packer Peak *Tom Ross Photo*

NAMING THE LAKES OF THE HIGH SIERRA

by John Schober

John Schober is a Bishop, California native, born in 1903. Between 1923 and 1942, he worked as a packer and then a prospector, in the Sabrina basin and other parts of the Sierra. In his prospecting days, Schober was known to pack hundred-pound loads of tungsten ore down on his back from Mount Emerson.

In that era, few people traveled the Sierra backcountry. Since Schober frequently traversed that territory, the California Department of Fish and Game began giving Schober Pack Station cans of live trout to pack on horseback up to some of the High Sierra lakes. John was the first to stock many of those lakes, and he gave most of the lakes in the Sabrina basin their names. This is Schober's own account of how and why he named them as he did.

Steve Sanford was a packer who worked at the pack station for us. He loved excitement and wreckage, but finally got so worked up over the hardships he caused for himself and others as a packer that he quit the business. But, he didn't quit until he had a lake named to suit his tastes.

In the '30s, there were many lakes that were barren of fish, and that had no trails to them. Steve had been up to these lakes and had taken a liking to one in particular. I had prowled over this area myself so when the fish hatchery brought up a load of fish for planting, I decided these remote lakes would be the place for them.

We headed up to the high country with our cans of fish strapped to the pack animals. Steve and another fellow who worked for us named George Wilson, took off for Steve's favorite lake while I broke off towards another nearby lake. After planting the lake with fish, I headed back to the spot where we had agreed to meet. Steve and George weren't there yet so I built a small fire and waited. They finally showed up at dusk — minus pack stock — so we were stuck there for the night without bed or grub. Steve brought up the subject of always being hungry and said that a lake should be named "Hungry Packer" for him. George and I decided to follow Steve's wishes.

The two of us went back to Steve's favorite lake and made a nice stone monument and placed the name "Hungry Packer" in a tobacco can.

This method became general practice in naming other lakes, but in some cases attempts were made by people who came along later to change the names to ones of their own liking. We probably couldn't have made our names stick except that I was known to be very stubborn, and I patrolled the monuments often.

One day a Mr. Colter from the U.S. Forest Service asked me to take him up to the lakes to see if they were being suitably named. Colter was pleased and later brought up nice porcelain signs and asked me to place them, which I did. The monuments and original names still stand. Later the names began appearing on maps of the area.

These lakes were usually off the trail and in very rough and tricky terrain, so it was my practice to get the horse to the lake, and once there my part was done. I soon got wise to one horse that crossed me every time . . . especially at dark. His name was Midnight. He was a fine, black, stout horse, very gentle, and valuable as a dude horse. I liked to ride him myself because of the power he had when the going got strenuous. But he failed to get me back by nightfall a number of times causing me plenty of hardship. One time, that horse trapped me at midnight in a snowstorm on the shore of a nameless lake. I knew the way out but it was too dark to walk and lead a horse. Let me tell the world, if a horse refuses to move at dark on his own free will, never force him. If you do, you are a goner goose. The next morning, I built a nice monument and placed the name "Midnight Lake" in a tobacco can. Even in daylight I had to correct that horse's route to get home. I was so provoked that I never rode him again.

No one was interested in naming lakes in those days, but it became necessary in our business to give them names so we could identify them on pack trips. Anyway, one bright morning I decided to dump some fish in a very high nameless lake. I had already been up to it and had marked the route. I took along for company a new packer that we had just hired named Gail Goodman, just about my age. We were making anywhere from ten to forty feet between rests or blows. I started whistling, which was common for me but, although I could make my whistling sound real nice, it was impossible for me to

continued on next page

reproduce the same tune twice since I had a habit of just whistling the way I felt. Gail liked music and played the guitar quite a bit. He hollered up to me as we were resting our horses, "John, did you know you were whistling a song by the name of *My Blue Heaven*?" Of course I let him believe it. We arrived at the lake, tempered the fish to the water, and then let them go into their new home. We had no time to spare since we wanted to get back before dark, so we headed for home. Soon after, I went back to the lake and put up another monument and a can with the name "Blue Heaven."

Another lake got a name while I had Mr. Colter, the Forest Ranger, with me. I was telling him about the time when I shot a Hell Diver (*Grebe*) in the middle of the lake. Since I had told Colter that all the lakes had been named except one, he said "Why don't you call it *Hell Diver* Lake?" So I did just that.

Another barren lake was all jammed with boulders of all sizes, and just for that reason named it "Topsy-Turvy."

There was a small lake nearby, not really worthy of a name, but I kept thinking of a brother-in-law of mine who went by the name of Sailor. He loved his liquor and usually had a little too much, so this lake became "Drunken Sailor" (later shortened to "Sailor" lake.)

George Wilson and I named "Moonlight Lake." We named it that mostly because I had named another nearby lake "Midnight," and we figured Moonlight would sound good with Midnight.

There was a little lake in just about the center of this group. It was in need of a name, so I took off one morning to name it. All the way up into the high country, I wracked my brain for a suitable name, but for some reason my mind was bothered and I kept thinking about something an old sheepherder named Brochet had told me the day before. He wanted to make me a very rich man quick, for he claimed to be an expert diviner as well as a sheepherder. The only thing lacking in our road to riches was a forked "dindleberry" root. He said that of I could find one, then he by his skill could find oil for me. When I arrived at the lake, all I could think of was old Brochet and his dindleberry root, so when I spotted a peculiar bush that had interesting forked roots hanging in the water, I took it. After all, it could be a dindleberry bush, couldn't it? Then and there that lake was named "Dindleberry." (It was supposed to be "Dindleberry," but somehow it got changed to "Dingleberry" later.)

John Schober in 1930 at 27 years old.

Names to suit my tastes were getting scarce, so I decided to use the word "Lakes" instead of "Lake." This way, one name would take care of a close-coupled group of lakes. Anyway, the next lake I came to looked much greener than any lake I had ever seen, so this small group of lakes were named "Emerald Lakes."

Next, one fine day, way up on the west side of this area, I spotted a couple of small, pretty lakes, which I stocked with fish. I didn't have a tobacco can with me, so I carved on a piece of wood the words "Schober Holes by John." I went back the next spring to see how the fish were growing. They had grown from almost zero to eleven inches. Of course, someone had taken that carved piece of wood, but I caught a nice mess of fish.

I forgot about "Schober Holes." Never tried to fix a name at those lakes again, but it didn't make any difference. Within no time, people were talking about fishing at "Schober Holes.'"

Just below "Schober Holes" was a fine, good-sized lake that was shaped like a big bottle with a nice neck. I named this one "Bottleneck" and placed the name in a tabacco can in the usual way. Then, just a few days later, the fish hatchery sent up a batch of fish in cans, and we took them as far as "Dingleberry Lake." We placed the cans in the stream with the lids off but with screens on. The water beating against the screens kept the little fish happy until they were planted.

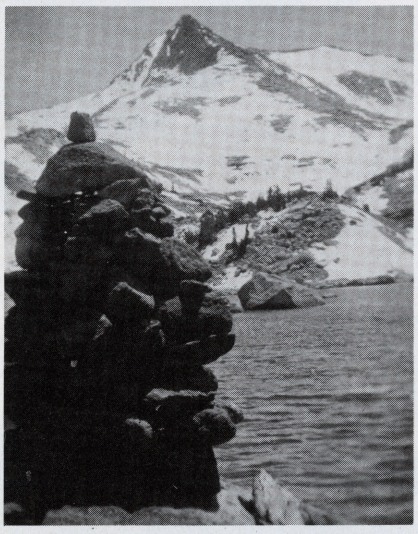
Below Bottleneck was a chain of smaller lakes not yet named. After the trail was marked, I had no trouble getting enough fish in these lakes, but I still hadn't come up with a good name for them. The boys at the hatchery knew that I was partial to Black Spotted Tahoe or Cutthroat trout. They looked like a Rainbow trout, but they were the best tasting fish one could eat, plus, they were the best fighters of all. The hatchery had marked cans of Golden trout, those went into "Schober Holes." I planted the cans marked Black Spotted Tahoe in other nearby lakes. This left me with some unmarked cans of fish, so I planted them in a small chain of lakes below "Bottleneck Lake." Only after I had dumped the fish into the lakes did I realize that the boys at the hatchery had fooled me. They knew that I hated this new variety of Eastern Brook trout, and now I had filled these lakes with them.

Eastern Brook trout are easy to catch — no fun, to me they are nothing but frogs. So I knew what would happen. Fly fishermen could catch these fish three at a time in a place like I just planted them. I could envision the shores of those lakes covered with fish guts. So I put up a monument of stone in the usual way, and placed the name "Fish Guts Lakes." I took a party back the next year, and they loved the place, but I was right. Fish guts were not only on the shore, but in the lakes as well.

I liked the name "Fish Gut Lakes," and a few days later tried to add "Bottleneck Lake" to this chain

of lakes. I knocked down the Bottleneck monument, did everything I could, even put up a new monument with the name "Upper Fish Gut Lake," people kicked the monument down in no time and all the fishermen still called that lake "Bottleneck Lake."

The story of the naming of these lakes could go on and on, but I'll only mention one more. In my early stocking of a chain of lakes east of "Topsy-Turvy Lake," I became very skeptical as to whether I could take packloads of fish to them without



Baboon Lakes in the Bishop Creek area west of Bishop, California.

unloading in a stream and relaying them from there by manpower. I had spent some time before looking for a possible horse path and knew there were lots of willows and rough terrain. I didn't want to pack all those fish in by myself, so I asked a fellow named Clark, who was in charge of a bunch of C.C.C. boys working at North Lake, if I could borrow eight of his best and most powerful boys to help me. Their job was to get out in front of me and the fish to find a suitable path. They did this by hollering out which way was best. Finally, the boys started getting so hot from their hard work that they tossed most all their clothes aside, and let me tell you, those boys were a sight. To me, they resembled a bunch of baboons beating their way through the bushes. And now you know how "Baboon Lakes" got their name. □

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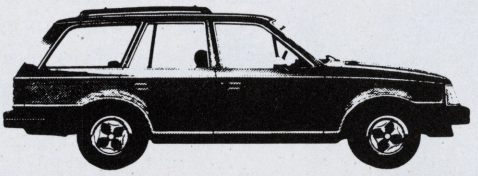

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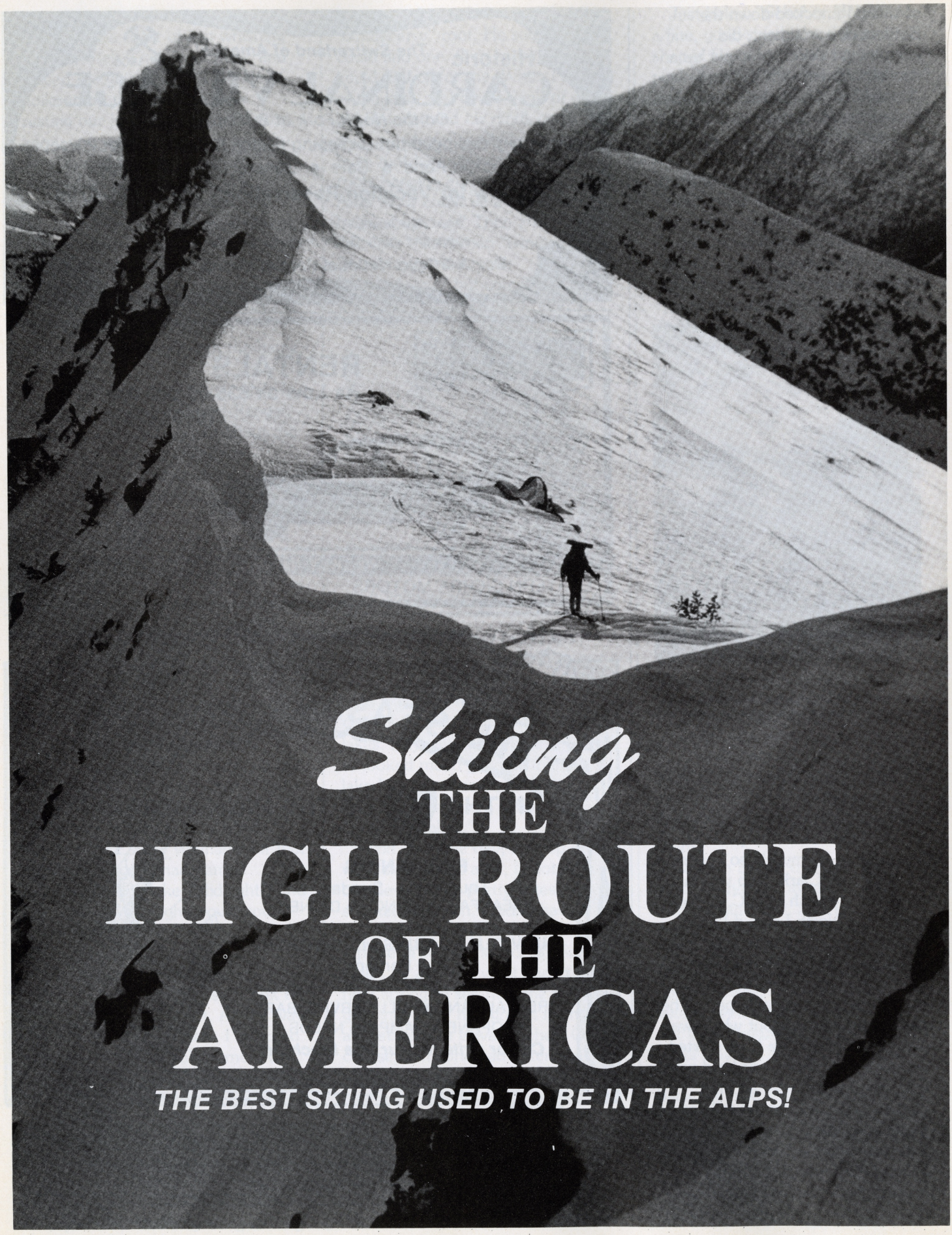


Skiing THE HIGH ROUTE OF THE AMERICAS

THE BEST SKIING USED TO BE IN THE ALPS!

Text and Photos by
Doug Robinson

There are teasing glimpses all morning while I'm skiing the open forest of huge pines off Watkin's shoulder, but abruptly the trees give way and there is Half Dome. It seems bigger than life from where I stand, looking straight across Tenaya Canyon at the great sheared face.

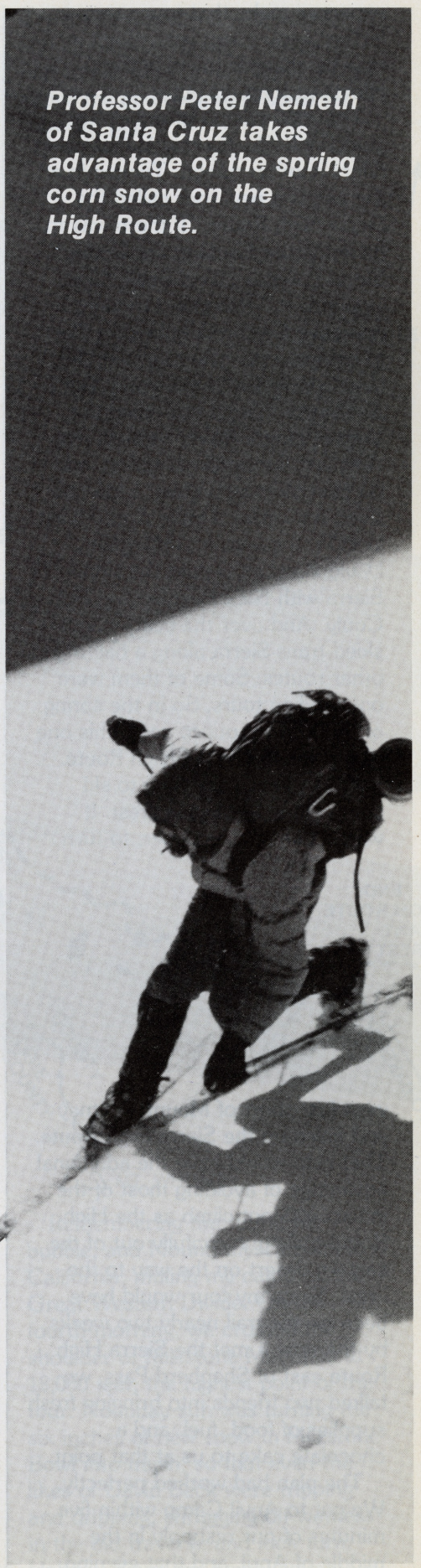
This view of Half Dome always signals the end of the skiing for what has become the universal first trans-Sierra. It didn't have to turn out that way. The word just got around that the Mammoth-to-Yosemite trans-Sierra was not only the easiest, but, well, a classic. It's a little like the standard route up the face of Half Dome, over there across the canyon, which is known throughout the climbing world as the way to break into Grade VI climbing. The easiest climb in the hardest grade, it is less intimidating than the others, yet memorable for classic passages and fine position.

The first time I stood up here across from Half Dome was with several other climbers who well knew the ledges and crack systems of that great wall. The intrigue for us had been getting over the crest of the range to this vantage point, our first tour on skinny skis. In the decade since, I have skied the route eight or ten times. My favorite companions were two who had never before seen Yosemite Valley. Imagine coming suddenly on foot to the rim of the awesome valley, emerging from the wilderness of Sierra Nevada at its wildest season, after skiing clear across the range from the east. Only such an approach can still give any idea of what Joseph Reddeford Walker and his party of fur trappers must have felt in 1833 when they rode onto the rim of the valley on their way west from the Great Basin.

Miss Milana Jank must have had similar feelings, but all she recorded when skiing to the rim across from Half Dome in the early 1930s was that she and her companion descended by the same Snow Creek Falls Trail, switchbacking down to Mirror Lake. Hers was the earliest recorded trans-Sierra to Yosemite, though many disbelieved her reported two-day trip from Lee Vining. But famous mountain man Snowshoe Thompson had been carrying the mail on skis, traveling back and forth across the range near Lake Tahoe as early as the 1850s (Sierra Life, July/August 1986).

To ski trans-Sierra, clear across the Range of Light: Who would think it possible during those first awkward moments on touring skis trying to kick and glide around a flat meadow? Yet the name says that this is a sport of traveling across country. So who, while peeling off damp longjohns that same evening, could resist dreaming of being able to climb the face of the range on skis, set up housekeeping right on the snow, and cut turns off the crest, gliding to civilization a week later on the other side of the mountain barrier?

As ski touring grew through the past decade—and the sport doubled in size almost annually—more skiers learned that with a couple of years of enthusiastic practice (and a good guide), they too could ski trans-Sierra. Which leads to a question that growing numbers have asked, standing on top of the Snow Creek switchbacks above Yosemite: What next? One could set sights on the best-known ski tour in the world, the *Haute Route*, which winds along the crest of the Alps for a week's traverse from Chamonix, France, to Zermatt, Switzerland. But escalating



Professor Peter Nemeth of Santa Cruz takes advantage of the spring corn snow on the High Route.

expenses make that tour seem farther away every year. Soon it may be cheaper to ski in the Himalaya than the Alps.

The 1980 edition of the classic guidebook *Ski Touring in California* offers another option. Tucked in at the end is a new tour called the Sierra High Route. "If there was to be an *Haute Route* in the United States," writes David Beck, "this would be it." Reading, I thought it was pure California hubris for Beck to compare his new tour with the most renowned in the world. But I also knew that he had skied the original *Haute Route* through the Alps just the previous spring, and on pin bindings, no less. I too had skied the classic *Haute Route* back in 1975, the year touring guide David Beck pioneered the trans-Sierra with Nick Hartzell and Bob Couly. And over the years I have skied trans-Sierra along a half dozen other routes. Some of them were outstanding tours. So in the spring of 1980 I went out to see if this one really was the Sierra High Route.

I was already planning to ski south along the Sierra crest. It wasn't difficult, on paper, to turn west just short of Mount Whitney and finish on the Sierra High Route. That plan would have the additional advantage of avoiding most of the initial 6000-foot climb as the High Route pulls unmercifully out of the eastern desert on the way to the crest. Since my tour would have been on the trail nearly two weeks by the time it met the Sierra High Route east of Shepherd Pass, we talked two friends into bringing fresh supplies of food, fuel, and a chocolate cake to us at that point.

The plan had worked perfectly. We got to Anvil Camp within five minutes of our resupply in the middle of April, and that evening David Beck himself arrived guiding a ski tour over the route. The camp sits in one of the few groves of foxtail pines in the Sierra and commands a view of the Owens Valley, a ten-mile-wide strip of high desert sandwiched between the eastern escarpment of the Sierra and the dust-dry White and Inyo Mountains to the east. The 4000-foot uphill trudge from roadhead to Anvil Camp was one we had been happy to leave to the imagination.

Our first day on the Sierra High Route began cold and ended by snowing. On the way to Shepherd Pass the surface of frozen snow got steeper and steeper until we found it prudent to take off our skis and follow a line of old steps fossilized in the hard crust. Up ahead, a member of David's party stopped to take a photo, balancing his pack between a knee and the frozen headwall. The pack escaped and first slid, then rolled, and finally cartwheeled toward us, hundreds of feet below its poor owner, who then acquired the distinction of climbing Shepherd Pass twice.

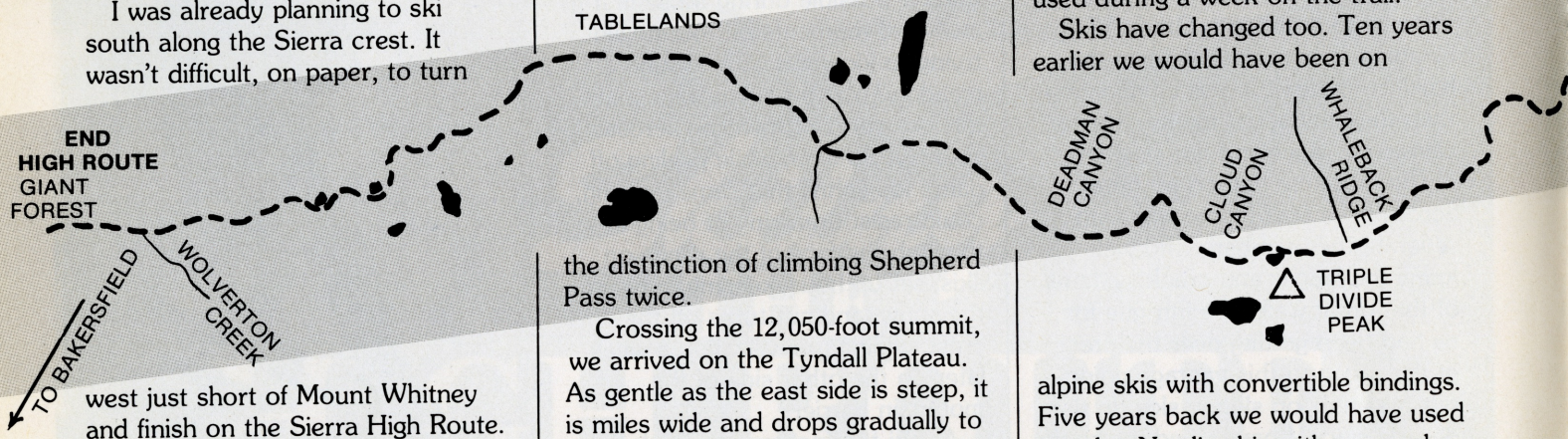
Crossing the 12,050-foot summit, we arrived on the Tyndall Plateau. As gentle as the east side is steep, it is miles wide and drops gradually to a ragged timberline, then more steeply into the Kern River drainage. Beyond is the Great Western Divide, forming the western skyline. We could have picked out the High Route weaving among the peaks of the divide, but it was too windy to linger for a panorama. Gusts up to 50 mph blew straight in our faces. There was only time to grab for clothes. I put my pack down on top of my skis to keep them from blowing away and put on every stitch I had.

The skiing was miserable. Leaning into the wind, we still couldn't glide down the gentle incline against the gusts. And the snow itself was no help at all. It was frozen solid even in bright sunshine, and the surface had been pitted by weeks of thaw until it resembled volcanic lava. Our ankles burned from the effort, we were too cold to stop for lunch, and when snow started to fall on the rim of the Kern River, we thankfully dove into the tent.

It snowed the next day too, from a thick cloud so we could see only one bench at a time as we zigzagged up Milestone Creek. We climbed on skins, which were new to us, though David Beck had been using them for some time. Originally made of sealskin, they are now just a napped fabric resembling stiff corduroy. A reusable glue backing fixes a thumb-wide strip down the center of each ski; with the nap facing to the rear they will glide forward but not back. Skins climb better than wax and remove more easily than klister. Furthermore, they actually weigh less than the assortment of waxes we would have used during a week on the trail.

Skis have changed too. Ten years earlier we would have been on alpine skis with convertible bindings. Five years back we would have used wooden Nordic skis with screwed-on segmented metal edges. Today's Nordic mountaineering skis—the current compromise—are just about halfway between a cross-country racing ski and a regular downhill ski in width, weight, and sidecut. They are made from fiberglass with metal edges, plastic bases, and the flex pattern of a powder ski.

The cloud lifted, wavered, and dropped again. Not knowing how much new snow might be creating an avalanche hazard on the steepest slopes under the pass, we stopped and set up the tent. Then, of



course, it cleared, the perfect excuse to check the avalanche hazard and make use of the new powder. Tom and I charged up the slope, literally running sometimes, feeling so light without our packs. The new powder was ankle deep, very cold, and light. We hit a small ridge within the bowl and kept climbing. After 500 feet we couldn't stand the suspense any more, turned off the ridge, and skied. It was perfect. Tom telemarked, I skied parallel, and the powder flew. We went from tight turns into wide arcs and all too soon were back in camp.

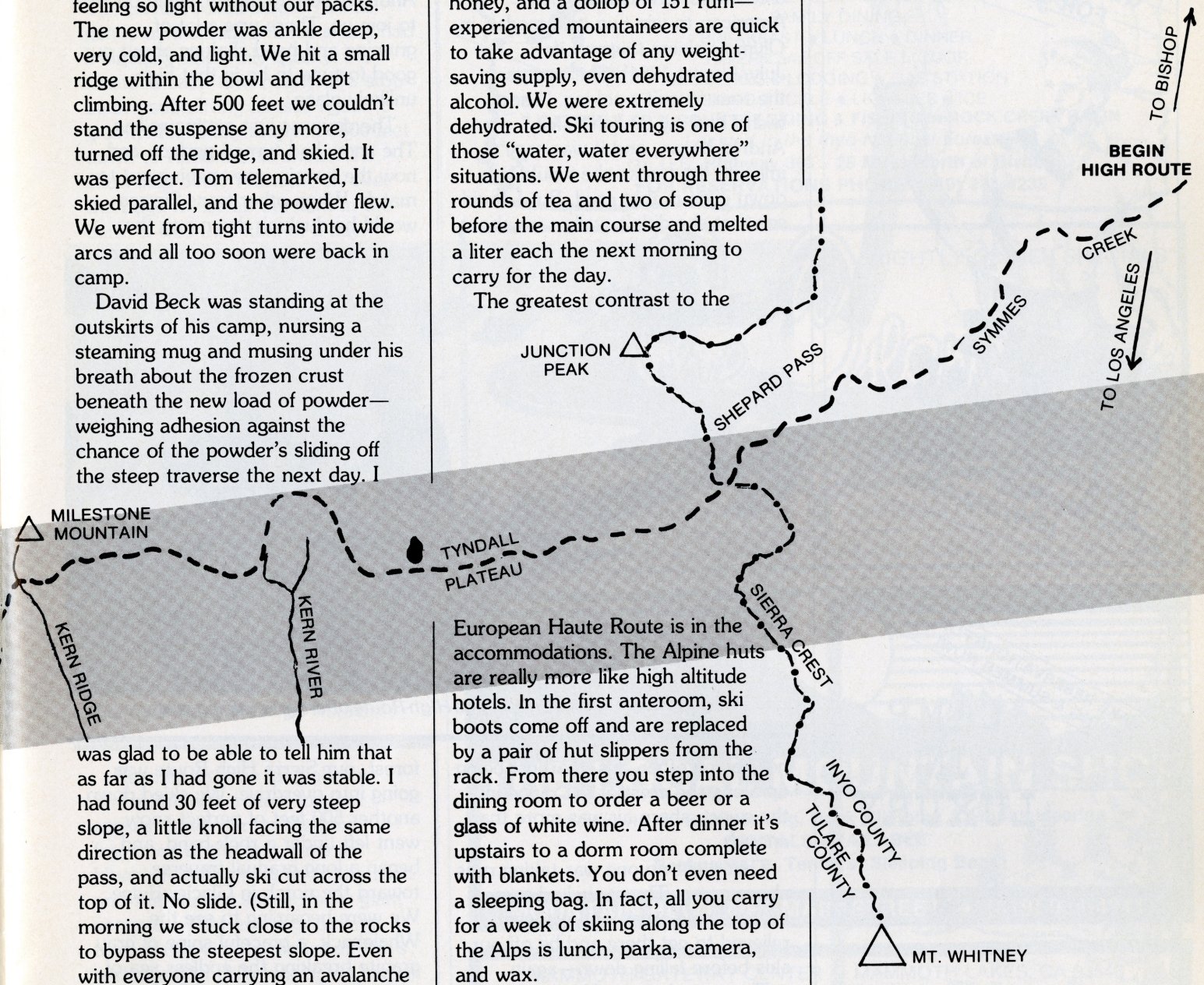
David Beck was standing at the outskirts of his camp, nursing a steaming mug and musing under his breath about the frozen crust beneath the new load of powder—weighing adhesion against the chance of the powder's sliding off the steep traverse the next day. I was glad to be able to tell him that as far as I had gone it was stable. I had found 30 feet of very steep slope, a little knoll facing the same direction as the headwall of the pass, and actually ski cut across the top of it. No slide. (Still, in the morning we stuck close to the rocks to bypass the steepest slope. Even with everyone carrying an avalanche radio beacon and David's faithful avalanche dog, Guinness, trotting along in dark glasses, we couldn't be too careful.)

"It's like camping in a Goddamned icebox," said Tim as he skied up to the camp. But he said it with a grin, and he hung around outside the tent with us until the lingering alpenglow on Whitney turned to ash. When we finally dove into the tent, it was two below zero.

Inside, the evening ritual was well under way. Snow was melting on one stove, tea steeping on the other. We settled into the backrests of our Octadome in a circle facing the teapot, which was soon poured out with dried lemon wedges, honey, and a dollop of 151 rum—experienced mountaineers are quick to take advantage of any weight-saving supply, even dehydrated alcohol. We were extremely dehydrated. Ski touring is one of those "water, water everywhere" situations. We went through three rounds of tea and two of soup before the main course and melted a liter each the next morning to carry for the day.

The greatest contrast to the European Haute Route is in the accommodations. The Alpine huts are really more like high altitude hotels. In the first anteroom, ski boots come off and are replaced by a pair of hut slippers from the rack. From there you step into the dining room to order a beer or a glass of white wine. After dinner it's upstairs to a dorm room complete with blankets. You don't even need a sleeping bag. In fact, all you carry for a week of skiing along the top of the Alps is lunch, parka, camera, and wax.

So much civilization in the evening, however, can mean 70 people on the trail with you the next morning, which diminishes the wilderness experience. Traffic had cut the route into a trench when I skied the Haute Route, so there's not much question about where you're going, and any powder that has fallen is likely to have been skied up. One morning when there *was* new snow I worked my way to the head of the line and skied hard, 3000 feet up to the top of the Pigne d'Arrola. I was half a mile in front and already beginning to savor my first tracks when a helicopter landed above me and disgorged some fat "powder pigs."



Remembering that burst my bubble, and I found myself back in California, muling my camp up the Great Western Divide. On the fourth morning, we crossed the shoulder of Milestone Mountain at 13,000 feet, the highest point of the tour. Noonday sun was turning the six inches of new snow in Milestone Bowl into mush, so that even the likes of David Beck were tripping and dripping, shrugging off wetness in the old traverse and kick turn. Halfway down the bowl I caught up

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with Andrea Mead Lawrence. She was the only memeber of David's group who had not skied trans-Sierra before, but she was admitted to the tour anyway because of her credentials: She is the only American to win two gold medals in Olympic skiing (Sierra Life, July/August 1984). She was using the tour to quit smoking. "I sure wish I had my downhill skis," Andrea began, and it was easy to imagine the tracks she would lay down even in that crud. But I could see that she didn't really care about not having other skis, that just being up along the crest of the range in the sweet, sharp air was more than enough.

That night no one was taking runs above camp. The snow had turned to breakable crust, and we were relieved to get there and be off our skis before falling down—again.

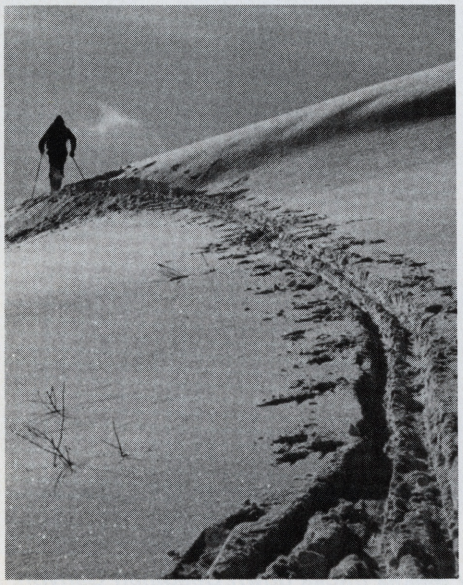
The next day, the fifth on the High Route, was the kind of perfect mountain day that lives with you forever. We struck camp purposefully and in an hour were on the notch by Triple Divide Peak, where it was too windy to linger. Dropping onto the north side of the ridge again brought a swift and dramatic change in the snow. In Milestone Bowl and on the sunny southern exposures the new snow had been rotting away to unskiable mush before our eyes, but here on north slopes, shielded from the sun, lay quiet fields of perfect powder. After we got below the wind, we stopped and were sitting on our packs eating dried mushrooms when Andrea's son, Matthew, skied down to join us. There was a lot of grinning and head shaking about our good fortune to be in that high, unlikely place. . .

The day was just getting rolling. The snow had turned perfect, and now the terrain was opening out to match. When other trans-Sierras would be ducking down into the forest, our Sierra High Route was going into overdrive. We skied down another 500 feet of perfect snow, went left under a rock band, and began a long gradual traverse toward the notch in Glacier Ridge. We were beginning to see the Whaleback, a graceful spine of gray granite breaking the endless sea of snow, its glacier-polished flanks shimmering with meltwater.

Along the traverse the snow got deeper and then irresistible. We threw off our packs and reveled in it, running up the slope to ski back down. I lingered so long that by the time we reached the notch, the figure ahead of me was already a speck, breaking trail across the top of Deadman Canyon. David Beck's group skied down and camped while we pushed on over another 12,000-foot notch, our third for the day and

Late afternoon over Cloud Canyon. The High Route offers great skiing and scenic views.

the last of the route. Near the notch I looked back to see David's tents ranged on a small flat. A lone figure broke from the camp and began cutting telemarks down the canyon. The terrain rolled before him as gently as a cloud, and his skiing had a similarly unearthly quality. He rounded each turn nearly to a stop before submitting himself again to gravity. He finally stopped 1500 feet down to remount his skins. The show was over. We went on over the ridge to set up our tent in the dark. It was that kind of a day.



Solitude along the High Route.

Reentry after so long above timberline was a feast for the senses. It went from the pine fragrance of the first trees to bluebirds welcoming us to the road and the hushed shade under giant sequoias. That evening, driving toward our victory dinner at Tim's restaurant in Bakersfield, we had all the van's windows open for the fragrance of orange blossoms that rolled in out of the darkness.

David Beck was right about the tour. It *is* the Sierra High Route. David smiled. "Yes," he said, "It's an elegant trip. It sneaks through, finding a high line without forcing its way. It never lapses into mountaineering, but you're glad to have the rope and ice ax along. There is good snow late in the spring, and as you go west the tour gets better, just when others would

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be petering out in the forest." A few months later it was David's turn to be surprised by me, for my original skepticism had given way, and even *I* was now calling the tour "The High Route of the Americ

and the smog layer that usually conceals what passes for civilization. Beyond the fog, way out on the horizon, floated the coast range of California, something I had seen before from the Sierra but

No lift lines in sight! Dion Goldsworthy makes tracks down Deadman Canyon.

It might very well be. I keep thinking back to an unnamed high notch between Cloud and Deadman Canyons. Over the notch were a series of granite bleachers where everyone was lounging, eating lunch and staring off to the horizon. So calm and warm a day on a high pass is rare, an event to be savored, and most of the skiers had been there an hour. Deadman Canyon was nearly identical to Cloud Canyon, behind us—a hugh glacial cirque rimmed by spikes of solid granite, yet offering a gently rolling high line across its top to yet another unnamed notch. Beyond was a glimpse of the high open plateau of the Tablelands. The skiing from there down into giant sequoia groves was hidden, and beyond, a cloud bank filled the entire central valley of California, hiding the oil fields and cotton gins of Bakersfield

could never count on the way John Muir had. The crest of the Sierra ran to the north in a sharp relief that can be seen only from a spot so high, yet far enough away to appreciate its sweep and scope. We could pick out familiar peaks and passes—the route we had been following for nearly three weeks. Sequoia National Park spread out to the south of us, and Kings Canyon reached away north; the only sign of civilization in the entire panorama was a thin line of ski tracks behind us.

Here was a more astonishing prospect than even Half Dome jumping up from the forest: a clear view halfway across California, exactly as it would have appeared when Pueblo de Los Angeles had only one dirt square and Snowshoe Thompson was just another kid learning to ski in Norway.

The High Route, indeed. □

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DEATH VALLEY & THE AMARGOSA

A Land of Illusion

Richard E. Lingenfelter

Richard E. Lingenfelter is a research physicist at the University of California, San Diego. He has written over a dozen books on Western American history and lore. SIERRA LIFE is proud to present excerpts from his book, *Death Valley & The Amargosa: A Land of Illusion.* This is a remarkable account spaning a century of records and recollections, up to the day when much of the valley was finally set aside as a national monument, and it brings to life all the people attracted to the valley by their dreams — the forty-niners, the 20-mule teams, Scotty, the Indians, lost argonauts, horse theives, lost mine hunters, prospectors and promoters, stockholders, hermits and tourists.

The sharpest realities of Death Valley are its extremes of depth and heat and aridity. It is, in fact, the lowest, hottest, driest spot in America.

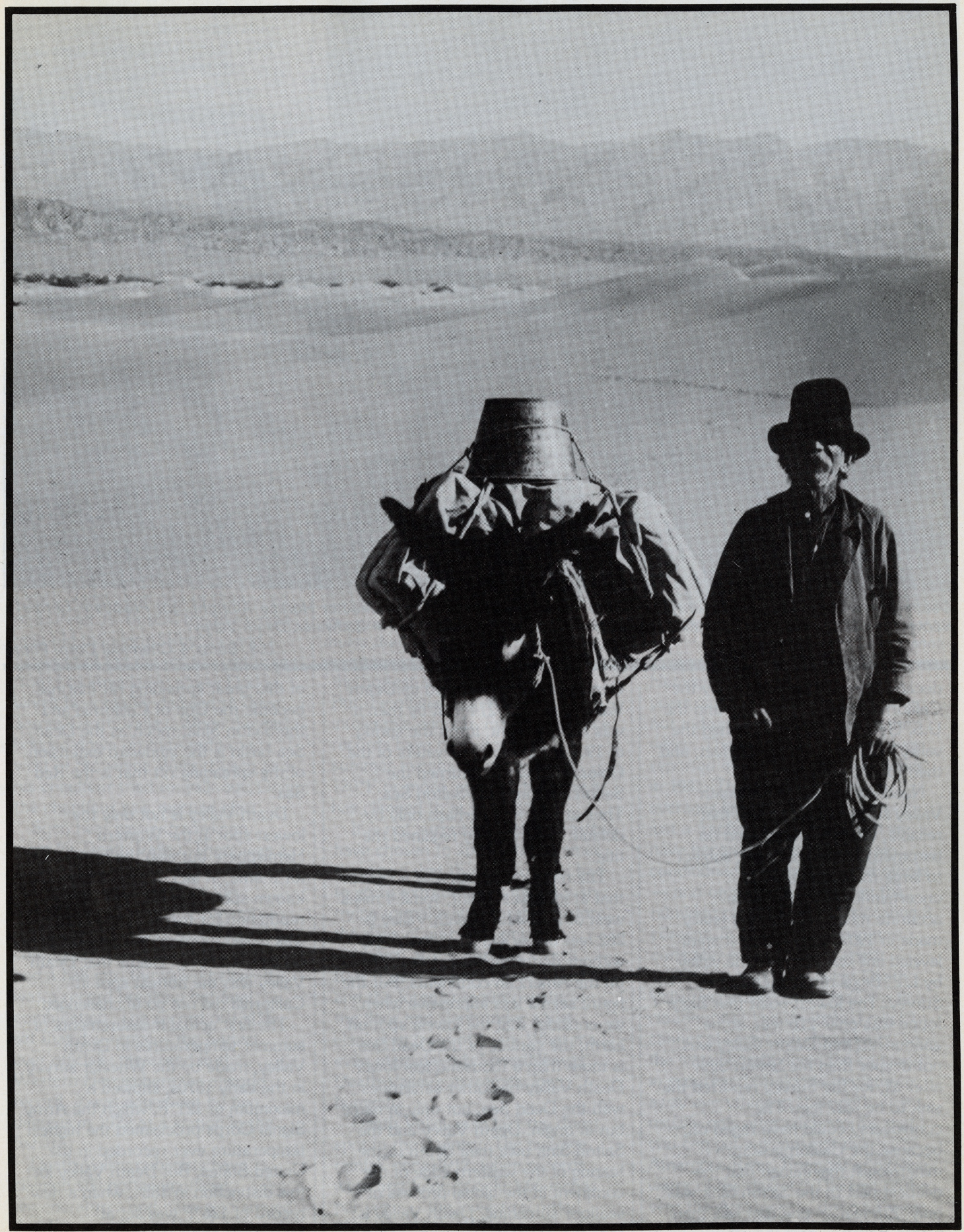
Joel Brooks was the first to guess, in February 1861, that the floor of Death Valley might actually be below sea level. He was better acquainted with the valley than almost anyone else at the time, having helped surveyor Henry Washington run the township lines through the valley four years before, and having just returned the previous spring as a guide for the army. But Brooks was also a braggart and border ruffian, said to have been run out of every town in the southern San Joaquin Valley. He boasted that he had killed more indians both in battle and in captivity than any man in California, and he didn't stop there; he had most recently killed a man on the Mojave River. A government officer, branding him "a vagrant and outlaw," had concluded, "It is hardly necessary for me to add that his statements are totally unworthy of credit." Still Brooks was hired as a guide for the California boundary reconnaissance party heading for the Death Valley country early in 1861 — but then they also brought along camels!

Considering his reputation, it is not surprising that when Brooks suggested to his companions that the valley they were about to enter was below sea level, he was answered with unbelieving, if cautious, scoffs and challenges to bet. Sides were quickly drawn and each new barometer reading was anxiously awaited as they moved into the valley. To the chagrin of the doubters, Brooks was right: they paid up on March 11, when the barometer set up on the salt flat below Furnace Creek indicated they were 377 feet below sea level. Later, more conservative analysis of the barometer readings, considering uncertainties in atmospheric conditions, showed that the lowest point reached by the survey was somewhere between 100 and 250 feet below the sea. But the startling fact remained that Death Valley, hundreds of miles from the sea, was well below sea level.

California State Geologist Josiah Whitney eagerly spread the word of the valley's great depth. Perhaps from some notion of the symmetry of nature, he also called attention to the fact that this lowest point in the country was only 60 miles from the highest point, which his colleagues had thoughtfully named for him. But the news was received with as much skepticism as Brook's original suggestion. One of Whitney's own assicates, a brash young paleontolist, Willaim Gabb, challenged the claim, maintaining that his own measurements showed that the valley was several thousand feet above sea level. Navada papers championed Gabb, chiding Whitney for wanting both the highest and lowest spot for California. Whitney's enthusiasm doubtless rubbed salt in a festering wound, since both these prized points lay within an area that was still the subject of a smoldering boundary dispute between the two states. Whitney nevertheless argued that Gabbs had simply mistaken the upper sink of the Amargosa at Ash Meadows for its lower sink in Death Valley, and subsequent measurements by the Wheeler survey confirmed this.

The Wheeler survey in the early 1870s, however, triggered a whole new controversy over whether Death Valley or the Salton Sink was in fact the lowest spot in the country. This issue wasn't resolved until after the turn of the century. Wheeler's surveyors reported that Death Valley wasn't as deep as had been thought, being at most only 110 feet below sea level. At the same time, surveyors for the Southern Pacific Railroad route found that the Salton Sink was at least 215 feet below sea level — not only much deeper than previously supposed but apparently deeper than Death Valley as well. Thus the Salton Sink was heralded as the nation's lowest spot. It held that title until 1891, when a government botanical expedition to Death Valley reported a depth in excess of -351 feet and won back the honor for Death Valley. A

continued on page 34



Death Valley prospector, Shorty Harris.

Photo courtesy of Arizona Historical Foundation

Death Valley was saved for posterity in 1933 when National Park Service director Horace Albright, got President Herbert Hoover to declare the valley a National Monument. Above, "Dante's View" at Badwater, Death Valley.

U.S. Borax & Chemical Corp. Photo

decade later, measurements by the California state mineralogist and the U.S. Geological Survey pushed the valley's depth down to -427 feet, and then to -480 feet.

Needless to say, these Death Valley surveys were not all that reliable, for they were based on barometric measurements, subject to large meteorological uncertainties. A much more accurate measurement was finally made in 1907, when the first spirit-leveled line was run into the valley by L.F. Biggs of the Geological Survey. The lowest point that Biggs found was only -276 feet, so he announced that Death Valley was not deeper than the Salton Sink after all, for the Survey reported the sink to be -287 feet. The controversy could have raged on, because the California state mineralogist maintained that the deepest part of the Salton Sink was only -275 feet — one foot less than Death Valley — and then the Geological Survey revised its Death Valley depth to -274! But by then it was a moot point, for in the spring of 1905 the rampaging waters of the Colorado River had turned the Salton Sink into the Salton Sea. Thus at last, and perhaps only by default, Death Valley regained the title.

The most recent surveys suggest that at its lowest point, some 4 miles west of Badwater, Death Valley is 282 feet below sea level, making it without doubt the lowest dry spot on the American continents. But the figure seems less impressive when we consider that the lowest spot on earth, the surface of the Dead Sea, is more than a thousand feet lower. Death Valley has other similarities with the Dead Sea, not only in name but in origin. Death Valley and the Salton Sink owe their depth to the tearing of the western edge of the continent in the global process of seafloor spreading. Death Valley is thus the deepest landward extension of that great spreading rift that has become the Gulf of California and the Salton Sink, much as the Dead Sea basin is the landward extension of the spreading rift that is the Red Sea.

Death Valley is not only the lowest spot in the Western Hemisphere but also the hottest — for a time, in fact, it was the hottest known spot on earth. Yet its early reputation for torrid temperatures was based more on imagination than on fact, and even claims that Death Valley was the hottest spot in California did not go unchallenged.

The first actual measurements of summer temperatures in Death Valley, made by the Wheeler survey in the early 1870s, showed a maximum of 121*F, which the Army Signal Corps proclaimed the highest temperature ever recorded in the United States. But Death Valley lost this distinction in 1884, when a new record of 126*F was set at Mammoth Tank station on the

Southern Pacific Railroad in Salton Sink; a year later, the temperature at the same station reached 130*F. Hotter unofficial temperatures were claimed at Furnace Creek Ranch in Death Valley, but when the U.S. Weather Bureau set up a temporary station there in the summer of 1891, the hottest it got was only 122*F.

Death Valley thus remained the second hottest spot until a permanent weather station was established at Furnace Creek in 1911. Then on July 10, 1913, during a heat wave when the temperature reached or surpassed the Mammoth Tank record on three separate days, Death Valley not only regained its title of the hottest spot in the United States but it became the hottest known spot on earth, as the temperatures soared to a searing 134*F. It may have been even hotter. The thermometer was only calibrated to 135*F and may not have given accurate readings at that extreme. Only a few people experienced that awful heat wave in Death Valley, and one of them died of it. Peter A. Busch, the thirty-nine-year-old founder of Rhyolite and a verteran of the desert, was returning from Los Angeles in a new Dodge, which he foolishly decided to drive across Death Valley. When the car bogged down on the sandy road west of Stovepipe Wells, Busch and his chauffeur tried to walk out. Only the chauffeur was rescued alive.

Such heat was extraordinary, even for Death Valley. There was a strong wind blowing in the valley that day carrying hot air from the Nevada desert over the Amargosa Range, where it was superheated by compression as it fell over a mile and a half into the valley below. It was a record-breaking but fatal combination. The record of 134*F set that day remains the hottest ever officially measured in the Western Hemisphere; as a world record, it was edged out by two degrees in 1922 at a station in the Sahara.

Death Valley publicists have claimed still hotter unofficial temeperatures and have also argued that Furnace Creek Ranch is not

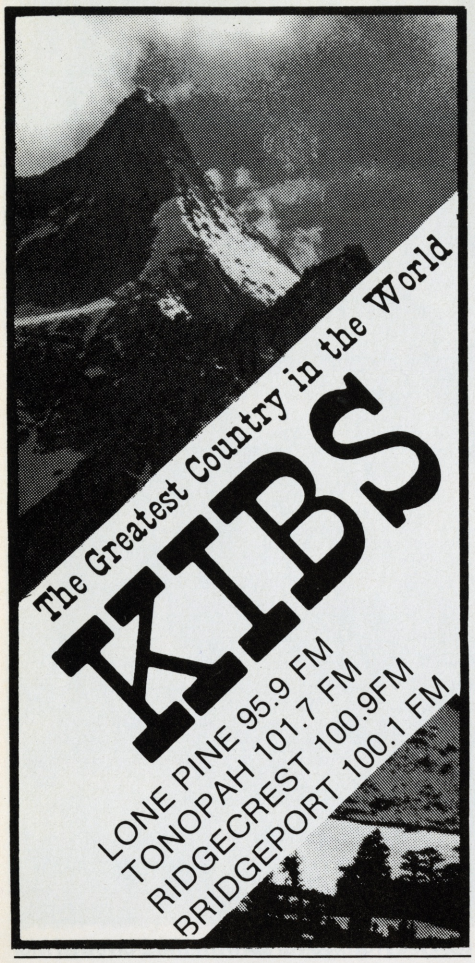
The grave of Furnace Creek Ranch caretaker Jim Dayton, covered with the bones of his mules that perished with him in July 1899. *National Park Service photo.*

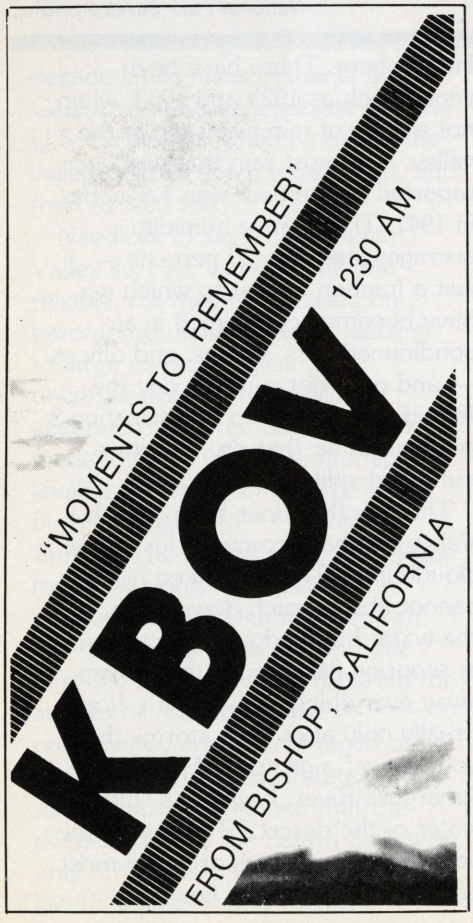
the hottest spot in Death Valley. But the official extremes are intolerable enough. Every year since records have been kept, the summer maximum has reached 120*F or more, and half the time it has climbed to at least 125*F!

It is not surprising that only a few have chosen to spend the summer there and that those who have had to go to extraordinary means just trying to make life bearable. Before the days of air-conditioning, workmen at the Furnace Creek Ranch slept in the irrigation ditches and the foreman poured water on the floor and slept under a wet blanket in front of a fan. What made even marginal relief possible was Death Valley's extremely low humidity.

Death Valley is in fact the driest spot in the country. The average rainfall since 1912, when records were first kept, is only 1.66 inches per year — the lowest recorded anywhere in the Western Hemisphere. There have been years, such as 1929 and 1953, when not a drop of rain was seen in the valley. The most rain that was ever reported in one year was 4.6 inches in 1941. The relative humidity averages less than 20 percent — just a fraction of that to which we have become accustomed in air-conditioned cars, homes, and offices — and on a hot summer day the humidity can drop to a desiccating 3 percent. In air that dry, furniture curls and splits and falls apart.

The rain that does fall in Death Valley generally comes in just a few cloudbursts. The dry baked hills cannot absorb such downpours, so the water bursts down the canyons in scouring flash floods that sweep away everything in their path. It is usually only after such storms that you can get a glimpse of the Amargosa River, Fremont's "bitter water of the desert." The rest of the year the Amargosa is dry over most of its course; the only flow is





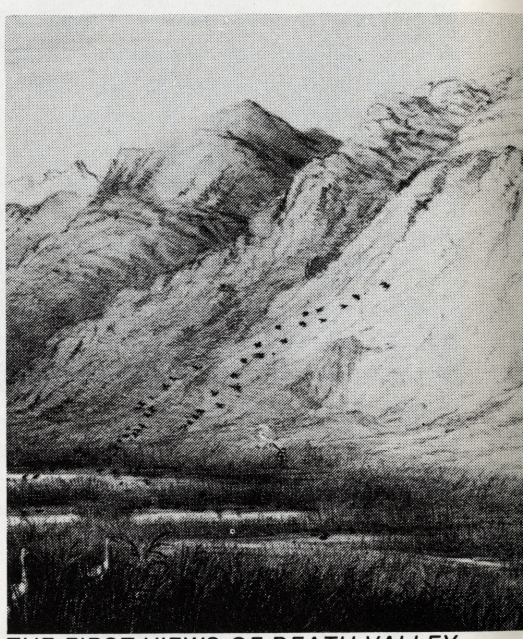
underground. Enthusiasts have claimed that the Amargosa is, in fact, the "longest underground river in the world." As a local paper noted, since it can't be seen, no one knows just how long it is, so the claim cannot be disputed.

The gold seekers of 1848 gave Death Valley its name and won for themselves a prominent place in its history. In getting there, however, many lost not only their way but their wagons, animals, belongings, and in some cases even their lives. The few tantalizing nuggets of gold and silver that they found in the valley were no compensation.

Their story has become the most repeated, though frequently garbled, tale in the history of Death Valley. It is in reality several separate stories only loosely intertwined, for the argonauts who trekked into Death Valley and the Amargosa came like a routed army in retreat — in scattered bands, demoralized and confused, each on their own course. Their stories are those of the jornada del muerto through Death Valley, the quest for Walker's cutoff, the gold at Salt Spring, the tragedy of Pinney's eleven, the ordeal of the Jayhawkers and Bugsmashers, the gunsight silver and Goller's gold, the triumph of the Wades, and the heroic rescue of the Bennetts and Arcans by Manly and Rogers.

The ragtag argonauts who stumbled into the depths of the valley were but a small part of that army of westering emigrants who struggled through Death Valley and the Amargosa en route to the goldfields of California. Nearly a thousand men, women, and children, over two hundred wagons, and a couple of thousand horses, mules, oxen, cattle, and dogs started down the Spanish Trail south from Salt Lake in the fall of 1849.

Not one had originally intended to take that trail; they had all started for the northern route to the mines, which led west from Salt Lake along the Humbolt and over the Sierra to the diggings. But for one reason or another — late starts or delays along the way — they had each reached Salt Lake too late in the season to get to the Sierra before the snow closed the passes. The Spanish Trail was not an inviting route: it was little more than a pack trail and was unsuited for wagons — only one wagon had ever been taken over it. It was poorly watered and foddered, with some jornadas of more than a day without any water or grass at all; and, if all this weren't bad enough, it took the gold seekers about 500 miles out of their way! But it was the only alternative to wintering at Salt Lake. For eager argonauts anxious to get to the diggings before the gold was gone, there was no other choice.

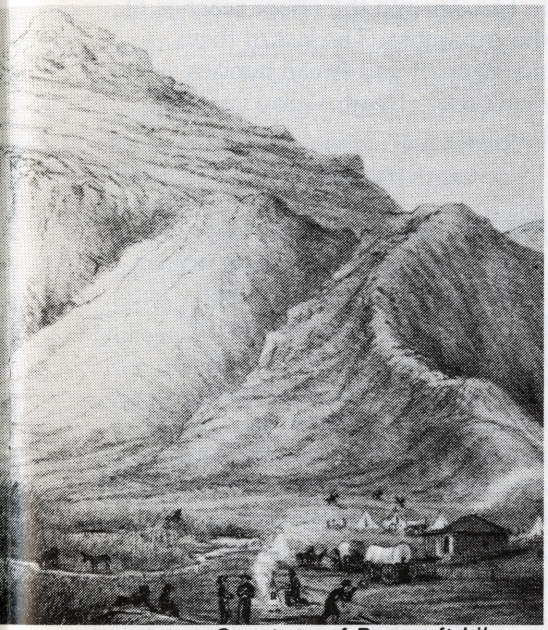


THE FIRST VIEWS OF DEATH VALLEY, published in an 1870 mining prospectus.

The first of the wagons to reach the Amargosa country were those led down the Spanish Trail by the Mexican whose name no one could recall. They were nearly out of food and living on their cattle, which gave when they got to Resting Spring in the latter part of November, so their guide and five others rushed to the settlements for relief. The wagons waited at Resting Spring for about a week, hoping that the Hooker train might catch up to give them aid.

Finally abandoning several wagons and other belongings to lighten their load, they moved out onto the jornada del muerto for the Mojave River. They just missed Hunt's wagons and the Mormon pack train, which arrived at Resting Spring before their campfires were cold.

Hunt and the packers didn't linger long at Resting Spring or elsewhere in the Death Valley country. Yet even in their haste, it was they who discovered the first gold in Death Valley. It seems a whimsy of fate that with all the gold seekers



Courtesy of Bancroft Library

trudging down the Spanish Trail in the fall of 1849, the discovery of gold was made by two Mormon missionaries bound for the South Seas! But they were, after all, the only men who really knew what to look for, because they alone had already been to the California goldfields.

James S. Brown and Addison Pratt were both called by Brigham Young to carry on the Mormon mission in Tahiti. Brown had joined the Mormon Batallion in the Mexican War, arriving at Sutter's Fort in the fall of 1847. He spent the winter there and was helping to dig the mill race when James Marshall found the first flake of gold. Pratt, who had founded the mission in Tahiti returned to California and went to the diggings in the spring of 1848. Both crossed the Sierra to Salt Lake later that year; then called to renew the mission, they were accompanying Hunt back to the coast.

On the afternoon of December 1, Hunt turned the wagons south from the Amargosa toward Salt Spring, which lay just beyond a low rocky point. Then he and four companions — Brown, Pratt, a man named Rowan, and a boy named Forbes — rode ahead to check the spring where they planned to camp, taking a shortcut through a notch of rocks. As they led their horses up the narrow pass, Pratt noticed bits of loose quarts and suggested that there might be gold nearby. At that they all started searching. Soon, several flakes of gold were found in the sand. The Rowan called out "Here is gold!" The others crowded around him to see the 4-inch quartz vein in which they had found several pea-sized grains of gold. After chipping out a few samples, they hurried on over to the spring a mile ahead, where the teams were already gathering. The discovery caused quite a stir, as several of the argonauts scrambled back to the spot to have their first look at California gold. Grabbing a cold chisel and hammer. Brown set to work, taking out more gold from their original strike while others prospected the surrounding slopes. The jornada del muerto still lay before them, however, and when Hunt gave the call to move on, the would-be miners relectantly fell in with the train. But the first gold had been found in Death Valley, and it was not to be forgotten.

From the time the first wagons reached Resting Spring in November of 1849 until the last wagon was abandoned in Death Valley in February of 1850, scarcely a day went by when one or more struggling bands of argonauts could not be found in some part of Death Valley or the Amargosa.

Hunt arrived at Resting Spring just after the first wagons had left, and just before he left, the lead

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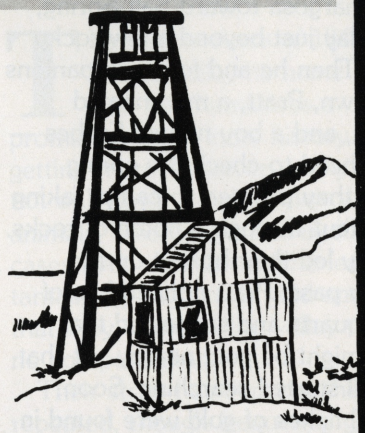

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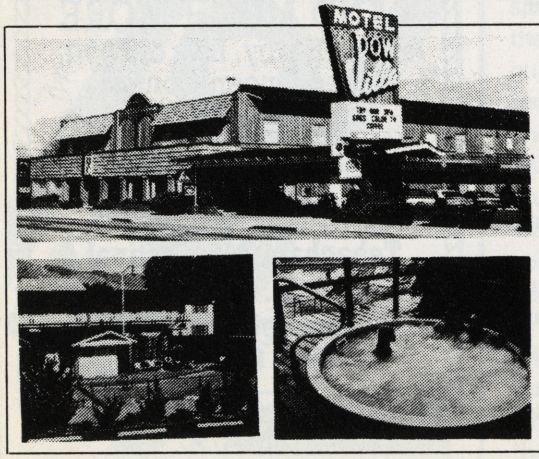

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wagons of the Hooker party pulled in, along with Stover's packers. In almost continuous succession they were followed by the straggling wagons of the Sand Walking Company, which had turned back to the trail from Mt. Misery, and by others who had gotten a later start — Egan's pack train, Pomeroy's wagons, and finally the Huffaker train, bringing the now infamous O.K. Smith, which passed through in early January 1850. Long before that, the scattered bands of die-hard cutoff seekers, who had refused to turn back to the known trail, began to blunder into the upper reaches of the Amargosa. The last of them — the Bennett and Arcan families — didn't leave Death Valley until February.

There were at least thirty of them, including three women and eight children, who headed down to the bottom of Death Valley with seven wagons. They were an odd assortment, thrown briefly together by chance and circumstance, with no bond other than convenience. The most cohesive were the Bennett and Arcan families — Asabel Bennett, a thirty-five-year-old Wisconsin trapper and lead miner, his wife Sarah, their two daughters and a son; and John B. Arcan, a French immigrant in his mid-thirties, his wife Abigail, and their infant son. They traveled with Bennett's friend William Lewis Manly and his companion John H. Rogers, both in their late twenties, and with four teamsters they had hired to drive their four wagons. The Wade family — Harry, nearly fifty, and his wife Mary, both English emmigrants, with their three sons, a daughter, and a teamster named Charles, who drove their wagon — always camped apart from the rest. Of the two remaining wagons, one belonged to the Earharts — two brothers, Jacob and Henry, and a grown son, John — who had started from Iowa with Stover's party. The other wagon belonged to Anton Schlogel, who was traveling with another Alsatian

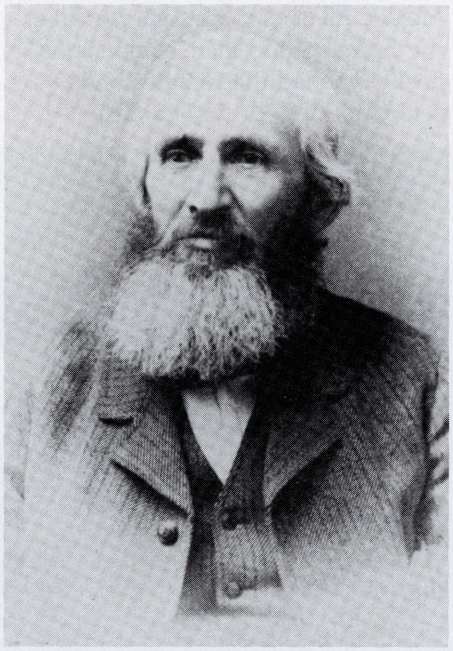
named Schaub and perhaps two others. In addition there were three packers: two Germans — Louis Nusbaumer, a thirty-year-old jewelry store clerk and avid diarist, and his companion Hadapp — and the ill-fated Richard I.A. Culverwell, an ailing forty-eight-year-old government clerk, who had left his wagon when his oxen died on the Amargosa and whose companions, the equally ill-fated Fish and Isham, and a black, Joe Smith, had left him at Furnace Creek to join the Jayhawkers.

On January 6, after resting for over a week at Travertine Springs near the mouth of Furnace Creek, the Bennetts and Arcans headed south across Death Valley to the base of the Panamints. The others followed the next day. In crossing the flats, Manly led the way, probing the wet salt crust with a mesquite stick in an attempt to find ground strong enough to support the wagons. In spite of his efforts one of the wagons broke through the crust and mired in the mud beneath. The teamsters eventually got the wagon out but it must have been a frustrating task, for all five quit a day or so later and set out on foot to follow the Jayhawkers.

The wagons slowly made their way from one spring to the next along the foot of the Panamints until they reached a small, sulphury water hole south of Bennetts Well. There seeing what looked like a good pass at the head of a canyon to the west, they suddenly decided to try to take their wagons over it without first waiting to explore it. They struggled for two days working the wagons up the canyon before they saw that they could not get through.

Upon returning to the water hole they debated long into the night over what they should do next. Finally Bennett suggested that their best bet was for two of the younger men to go on ahead to the settlements for help. Manly and Rogers agreed to go and the following day, January 15, taking about ten days' rations of jerky and some $60 in coin with which to buy food to bring back, they started off on foot for the settlements. The rest moved back north several miles to the fresher water at Bennetts Well to await the boys' return.

Not everyone agreed that waiting was a wise policy, however. They argued that since "They had nothing to live on but their oxen, it would be certain death to wait here and eat them up, and that it would be much better to move on a little every day



William Lewis Manly, one of the heros and namers of Death Valley. Courtesy, George Koenig

and get nearer and nearer the goal before the food failed." Bennett countered that only by waiting for the boys to return could they be sure to "get out successfully." But the rest had little faith in their return, maintaining that "if those boys ever get out of this cussed hole, they are damned fools if they ever come back to help anybody."

Henry Wade, who had previously been content to follow along behind the rest, now took the lead in searching for a wagon pass farther south. None realized that if, instead of crossing the mountains to the west, they simply followed the valley to the south they would come to the Spanish Trail at Salt Spring. Wade, however, found a pass to the west through Wingate Wash, and about January 22 he and his family set out in thier wagon, accompanied only by Schaub, one of the Alsatians, whom Wade hired as a teamster to replace the man who had left. Working their way easily through Wingate Wash, they turned south, possibly following an Indian trail by way of Lone Willow Spring and Granite Wells — a good wagon route that was later used by the first borax wagons from Death Valley to Daggett. In less than a week they had reached the Mojave River and the Spanish Trail, near present-day Barstow. Two days later, on January 29, they met some men heading out to Salt Spring to look for the gold Hunt's party had discovered. They gave the Wades a bucket of flour — the first they had had in weeks — and the news that the first ranches were just 60 miles on down the trail. After resting their animals for a few days on the Mojave River, Wade brought his wagon into Rowland's Ranch at Puente on February 10.

By then, all but the Bennetts and Arcans had set out to follow Wade's trail. They had started less than a week after the Wades, but they were so crippled with scurvy that after three painful days they had to turn back. Nusbaumer's feet were so swollen that he had to cut his shoes open to the toes just to get them on, only to find that even then his feet hurt too much to walk far. While they recuperated, a couple of others, probably some of the Earharts, scouted ahead and reported back that Wade's trail did in fact look like a practical route. Thus all but the Bennetts and Arcan families started out again on February 7, with what scant provisions as they had loaded onto the Earhart's wagon.

After just one day on the road Culverwell realized he was still too weak to travel and turned back again for Bennett and Arcan's camp at Bennetts Well. He died several miles short of the camp, barely a day before Manly and Rogers returned to recue the remaining members of the party. They found him, Manly recalled, lying "upon his back with arms extended wide, and his little canteen, made of two powder flasks, lying by his side."

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Culverwell is the only argonaut known for certain to have died in Death Valley, although there are eleven others who might have — Wiley Webster and his companions, the unknown man with a bullet hole through his forehead, and possibly young John Earhart. Stover later heard that Earhart died there, but no evidence has been found to confirm or deny it.

Following Wade's trail to the Mojave River and the Spanish Trail, the Earharts and their companions finally reached the ranches and safety about February 26. The Darwin French, Manly and Rogers brought three pack horses, a poor little one-eyed mule, and sacks of beans, wheat, good meat, and oranges for their return trip. But trying to make time retracing their route, they rode the animals too hard. One horse dropped dead in the Argus Range and the other two gave out trying to climb the Panamints. Only the desert-wise little mule came through. Finding Culverwell dead on the floor of Death Valley, Manly and Rogers feared that they had returned too late and that the others were also

"LEAVING DEATH VALLEY" The forty-niners' ordeal was illustrated with this scene.

Wade and Earhart wagons were the only two to make it through out of more than two dozen wagons that had started west from Mt. Misery: the scrapped and burned remains of the rest were scattered all the way from Timpahute to Death Valley.

***

Manly and Rogers had been gone twenty-six days on their heroic recue mission to the ranches and back. They had come upon the Jawhawkers trail crossing the Slate Range several days ahead of them. Traveling light and fast they caught up with some of the Jayhawkers at Indian Wells, passed the rest near Red Rock Canyon, and reached the San Francisquito ranch on January 26, nine days before them. There, with the aid of Tejon rancher dead. Their fears grew as they neared the camp and saw the wagons stripped of canvas and no sign of life. Manly imagined that Indians had raided the camp and might still be waiting to ambush them. Fearing to approach closer than a hundred yards, they fired a warning shot, and their fears fled as their friends suddenly emerged from under the wagons.

It was a joyous reunion lasting late into the night, as the Bennetts and Arcans ate their first real meal in months. But after the initial elation came the sobering realization that they were still more than 200 miles from the nearest ranches. In a couple of days everything they could take with them was packed. Leaving their wagons and most of their

belongings behind, they set out once again on the afternoon of February 13.

Rogers led the march with his ox and the mule; Bennett and Manly guided the other pack animals; the women each rode an ox; and Arcan followed leading Old Crump, a slow, steady old ox that carried the children — the older two on his back and the younger ones in bags slung on either side. But they had gone only 4 miles when a pack on one of the oxen slipped over to one side and the animal went wild, bawling and bucking and kicking and thrashing to get free of the thing. The others joined the rampage, all but the little mule, and soon packs and a couple riders were scattered in the sand. It was more comic than tragic, for no one was hurt, but thereafter the women decided to walk. It was late in the afternoon before the packs were all gathered up and the harnesses mended, so they made camp right there and Rogers and Bennett went ahead with a shovel to bury Culverwell. Early the next morning they climbed up Six Spring Canyon, and by nightfall they were nearly out of Death Valley. They camped high in the Panamints at a spring just short of the crest. From the summit the following morning, February 15, Manly, Bennett, and Arcan took a long look back and uttered those parting words, "Good-bye Death Valley!" which have cursed the place ever since.

Their trek to the settlements was a twenty-three day ordeal over rugged, desiccating terrain. But all survived and on March 7, 1850, they struggled into the San Francisquito ranch: four months from Mount Misery, the last of the argonauts emerged from the jaws of hell.

And what became of them all? None of them, of course, found the fortunes they had dreamed of in the diggings, and most returned home in disillusionment. Even those who stayed left the diggings for the rich farmlands or rising commercial centers. But none ever forgot the awful ordeal that brought them into Death Valley and the Amargosa. The Jayhawkers even held annual reunions to celebrate their deliverance. A few later wrote down their memories of that terrible trek, but none did so as thoroughly or as eloquently as William Manly in his now classic *Death Valley in'49*. Yet even Manly didn't tell it all, or tell it quite straight. Worst of all, he never mentioned that the Wades and Earharts had simply taken their wagons out to the south. Perhaps he feared that that would have spoiled the heroic climax of his rescue of the Bennetts and Arcans.

But long before Manly and the others ever got around to writing of their ordeal, the cursed name they had left on the land and all of the sensational rumors of riches and horrors that had grown out of their ordeal had already transformed that lonely piece of desert into the deadliest, richest, and most mysterious spot in America.

For those who tried to work its minerals, the remoteness of Death Valley was a much greater problem than were the occasional Indian raids. But to those who chose to work the stockholder instead, Death Valley's remoteness was a vital ingredient for success. The first to make this discovery was Lieutenant Robert Bailey of Oroville. Bailey first came to Death Valley country in the spring of 1860 with Darwin French, chasing the elusive Gunsight. He held a share in a number of good leads in the Cosos, but it was the Amargosa Range on the eastern edge of Death Valley that he claimed to have made his big discovery.

In January 1861, Bailey appeared in San Francisco. News from Coso was creating a lot of excitement, what with reports of rock assaying over a thousand dollars a ton. But these paled to insignificance when Bailey produced a strange new rock, heralded as "the richest that has ever been found," yielding a prodigious $16,342 to the ton! Reporters and would-be investors flocked around him, wanting to

continued on page 43

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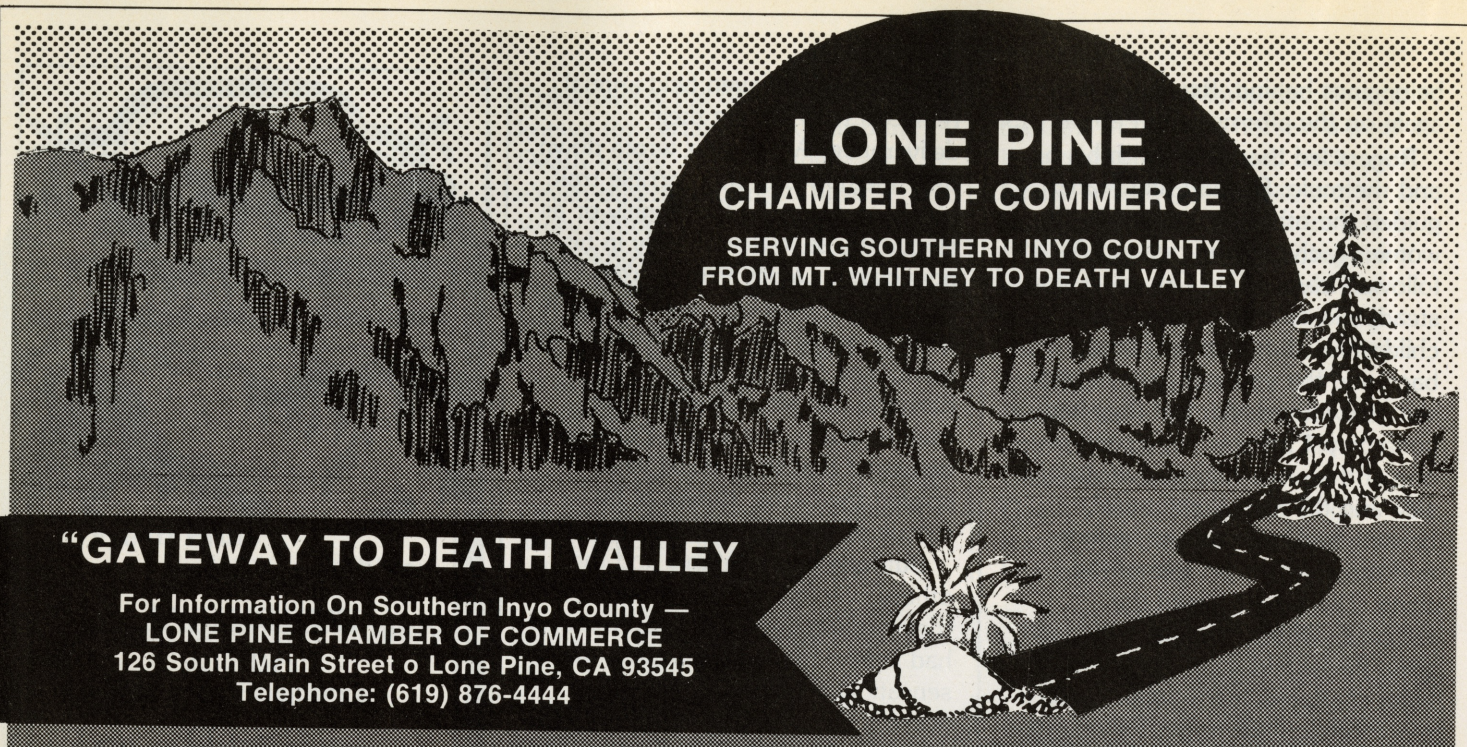

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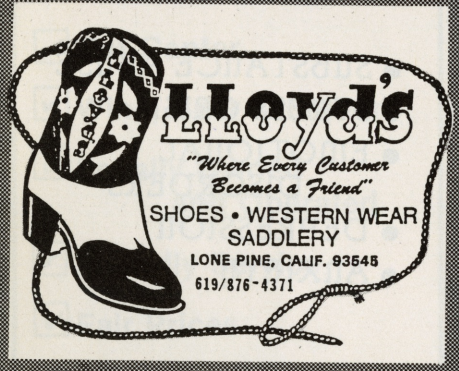

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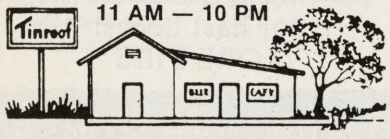

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know more about the wonderful ore and the lode from which it came. Bailey assured them that his lode was "inexhaustible" and that the country around it abounded in rock just like it. But he preferred to keep the location of his find a secret . . . Bailey's evasiveness further piqued the interest of his would-be partners, who were willing to buy a mine they had never seen nor even knew the location of, if Bailey would only go and get a little more rock to show them. Bailey readily agreed and left early in February for this wonderful lode. No less than seven "exploring companies" organized in San Francisco just to follow him, but he gave them all the slip.

By the time Bailey returned in April with three or four bags of rock and a newly acquired partner, Dr. Benjamin Franklin Dewey of Stockton, his investors were more anxious than before. Even though this new rock assayed only $4,200 a ton, real estate broker O.B. Bagley and a few others eagerly paid him $12,000 "cash on the nail" just for a half interest in what Bailey said was the "first southeast extension" of his claim . . .

Meanwhile, Bailey's original investors were becoming anxious to see returns on their money, so they put up an assessment of $2 per share to outfit a crew to go to the mine and bring back a ton of the wonderful ore. Bailey, who was of course the company's superintendent, took charge of these arrangements and of the money. He signed up several workmen and ordered a stock of picks, shovels, and groceries. The crew was to travel by way of Los Angeles on the steamer *Senator* on July 18. Bagley and other investors, who wanted to see the fabulous Bailey Lead for themselves, also booked passage on the *Senator*, and Bailey thoughtfully gave each of them a sturdy new canvas sack to fill with the wonderful ore.

When the date of sailing came, Bailey was nowhere to be found. One rumor had it that he had several matters to attend to in Los Angeles and had gone ahead to meet the party there. Thus Bagley and the others confidently steamed off for Los Angeles, although the workmen Bailey had hired were left standing on the dock because he had somehow never gotten around to paying for their passage.

. . . Bailey's wonderful ore had attracted attention not only from prospective investors, who ogled at its richness, but from geologists and mining men who were interested in learning the processes of its origin. Some had noticed earlier that instead of the usual matrix rock associated with silver ores, several of Bailey's specimens had loose dirt and sand fused to them! But Bailey had casually explained that a volcano had opened directly on the line of the lode and that "the fire had smelted the ore," causing it to flow out over the countryside. This explanation satisfied the faithful, but not the former geologist for the Pacific Railroad Survey, William P. Blake, who managed to get hold of some of the "unsmelted" rock shortly after Bailey's departure (from San Francisco). Blake made a thorough analysis and reported his findings to the California Academy of Natural Science early in August. Not only did he show that the ore was unlike any known mineral but he found a chunk of charcoal in the middle of a piece of the "so called ore"— clear evidence that the stuff was artificially and rather sloppily concocted in a backyard furnace!

With this news the Bailey bubble was undeniably burst, but the mystery of his whereabouts lingered on. It was rumored that on the day before the *Senator* left for Los Angeles, Bailey and Dewey had left on the steamer *Salinas* for Watsonville, where they purchased two horses. Then in mid-September, a startling discovery was made. Travelers crossing the sandy marshes between Tulare and Buena Vista lakes in the south end of the San Joaquin valley came upon a deserted camp spattered with blood. Following the trail of gore into the tules they discovered the grisly body

continued on page 44

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of a man, tied by the heels, his head and face mutilated with buckshot, and burned beyond recognition. They promptly buried the body, but bits of the clothes and a knife found on the body were taken to Visalia, where some identified them as belonging to none other than Robert Bailey.

Thus the mystery remained. Had Bailey and Dewey quarreled, and one of them murdered the other, or had they murdered and mutilated some innocent traveler and dressed him in Bailey's clothes? The only certainty was that at least one of them had gotten away with at least $25,000 — some said as much as $100,000.

Thirty years later, an aging bartender in San Diego occasionally entertained his patrons by recounting a few adventures of his younger days. He would start with the hardships of his trek across the plains in 1849 and then tell of his luck, good and bad, in the placers at Bidwell's Bar and Shasta; of his fights with the Indians in the Pit River was, where he earned the rank of Lieutenant in the volunteers; and of his quest with Darwin French for the famous Lost Gunsight. Here he would lapse into cataloging the perils of crossing Death Valley and would mention only in passing that they failed to find the elusive silver lode and that in the summer of 1861, he sailed away to Tahiti on the aptly named brig *Surete*. In old age Bob Bailey had become a master of understatement. He might also add that when he returned a year later, he mined for a time in Idaho and Montana, and hired out as an Indian scout in Wyoming and the Dakotas, before he finally settled down in 1869 to tend bar in San Diego. Bailey was a changed man by the 1890s — a man who had held one job for over twenty years and who spoke with pride of having been appointed a deputy sheriff for eight months. Indeed, those who once sought him would probably have never recognized him, and thus he remained a successful fugitive from justice to the day he died.

. . . Had Bailey and Dewey quarreled, and one of them murdered the other, or had they murdered and mutilated some innocent traveler and dressed him in Bailey's clothes?

So whose mutilated body had been found in the tules? That is another story. □

Death Valley & The Amargosa - A Land of Illusion by Richard E. Lingenfelter. 664 pages, illustrated. $39.95 Clothbound. Published by University of California Press. This book may be ordered directly from:
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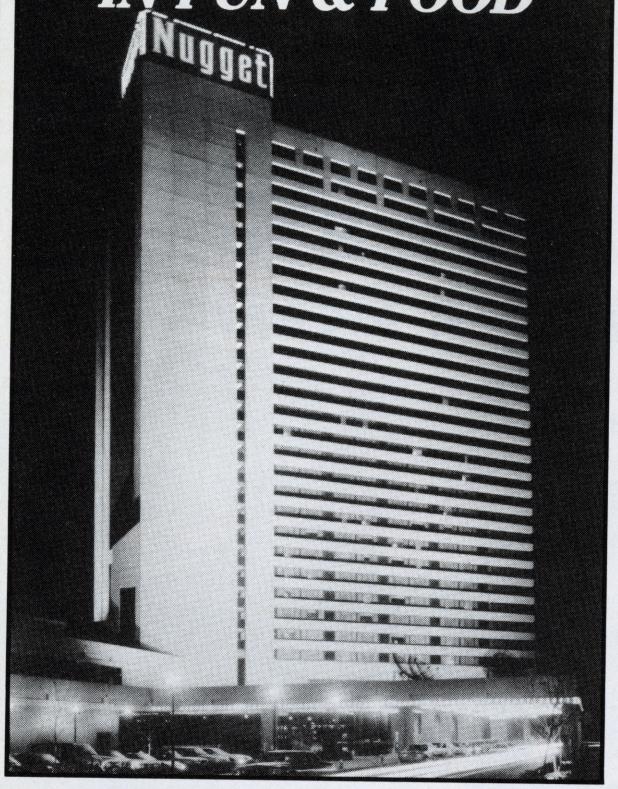

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The 'BIG ONE'

. . . not your average "Fish Story"

By Mike Martell

Everyone who has ever dropped a line, has imagined what it would be like to catch the 'BIG ONE.' For those who never will, and for those who keep trying, I offer this "Fish Story."

After five weeks of postponment, I was taking Jim Alzer up on his offer to go fishing on the family boat. I had just returned from vacation on June 18, 1986. Jim had just returned from a business trip. There was plenty for me to do around the house after being away, but the heat in the valley brought on a desire to escape to a cool High Sierra Lake and play hooky.

Jim and I agreed to meet at 2:00 and finally, by 3:30 that afternoon, we were on our way. I was more than ready. The full moon was just three days away and the Department of Fish and Game had just stocked Lake Sabrina earlier in the day. As we left Bishop, a light, hot breeze was blowing. We were a little concerned about wind conditions at the lake.

Within an hour of leaving Bishop we were making our way across the lake to the inlet, where we would have some protection from the 15 mph winds. Two other brave boaters were on the lake. The shoreline was empty except for a few people bundled up against the cold wind. The lake was usually crowded at this time of day, but conditions were less than perfect.

Hall Cluff, owner of the Cardinal Village Resort, watched us pull away from the dock. He shook his head in disbelief that we would venture out on a day like this. Jim shouted to Hal, "We're going to catch that eight-pounder with your name on it." Hal's broad smile confirmed his 'yeah sure' attitude.

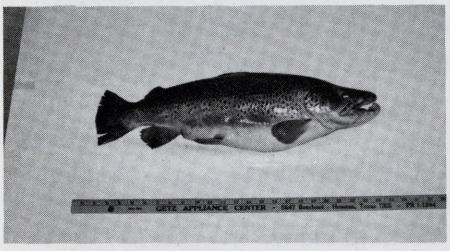
Jim turned the boat into the wind as we left the dock, and the wind-whipped chop created a cold spray as we made our way across the lake. I zipped my vest to the neck and settled down in the aluminum boat, wishing I hadn't left my heavy jacket in the car. The afternoon sun began to warm me. I thought to myself that it really didn't matter if we caught a thing, it was nice just being here.

A drop in the engine's rpm interrupted the spell. Jim had spotted a large cove where a waterfall cascaded into the lake. This was a perfect spot, and anticipation of what lay ahead was building. It was time to rig up.

Jim pulled a 5 1/4" Rapala lure out of his tackle box. My eyes must have revealed my surprise. Jim casually mentioned that he had caught 5" browns with that lure, "And besides, you need one this size to catch the 'BIG ONE."

I attached a new 4 1/2 Rebel lure. Being mainly a shore firsherman myself, I was unsure how this lure would perform while trolling.

We let out our lines and Jim set the course to run about forty feet out and parallel to the shore. As we approached the cove, he continued straight in order to align us with what appeared to be a large "hole"— the perfect place to find the elusive German Brown trout.



Jim picked up speed, and my lure broke the surface. My new lure was no match for our accelerated trolling speed. The intense expression on Jim's face cautioned me to say nothing. I let out another 25 feet of line, hoping the lure would drop below the surface.

Jim guided the boat around the point north of the inlet cove. A quick tug on my line caught my attention, but my vision of catching the first fish of the day quickly vaporized when no second tug followed. Jim slowed the boat when he saw my reaction, but went on when disappointment crossed my face.

The motor nearly died and I turned to see Jim's rod bending 45 degrees. I quickly reeled in my line, as Jim yelled, "All right, its a monster!" He turned the boat toward shore, dropped the motor to idle and adjusted his reel brake.

I looked toward shore, and saw a

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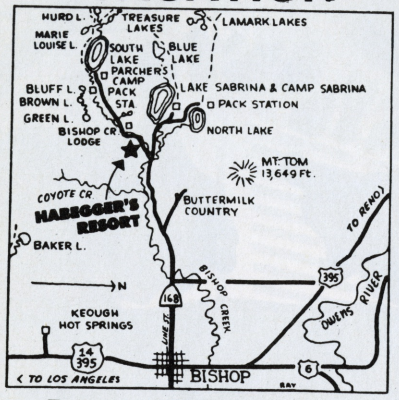

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disbelieving look from an angler standing near the water's edge. And then I saw it. Forty feet away, the 'BIG ONE' slapped the water with it's tail.

Jim's eyes were wide as he bit his bottom lip and watched with a tinge of excited panic, as the fish turned and headed toward a floating log. Jim stood up and fought hard to guide the fish away from the log. At the last possible moment, with rod bent at 60 degrees, the fish turned away from the log. "Did you see it," Jim yelled. "I saw it. Eight pounds easy," I shouted back. The fish broke the surface a second time and the sun caught its full color.

Fifteen feet from the boat, the dark shawdow began to rise. The hooked jaw was clearly visible as Jim brought the monster along side the boat. A firm sweep of the net, and it was over. Relief and astonishment radiated from Jim's face. The 'BIG ONE' was his.

The angler on shore yelled, "What did you use?" We had drifted within twenty yards of shore, and the man's face shared our excitement. It was 5:14 P.M., and the wind didn't seem to matter anymore.

We headed back to shore with Jim's monster fish and three other trout, smaller in size, that he had caught on the 5 1/4" Rapala lure.

As soon as we reached the dock, Jim was off to the Lake Sabrina Cafe. When I finally caught up with him, he was showing off the 'BIG ONE' to resort owner Juanita Apted and her son Rick. I discovered later that Jim had been following Rick's fishing advice.

Jim's fish weighed in at 7 3/4 pounds — a three-year record at Lake Sabrina had been broken. Congratulations continued as Rick took photographs of Jim and his 24" trophy.

On the way back to Jim's place, we couldn't resist stopping by the Cardinal Village Resort to visit Hal Cluff. He was as excited as Jim was over the 'BIG ONE' . . . and something told me that Hal was going fishing real soon — even if the wind was blowing. □

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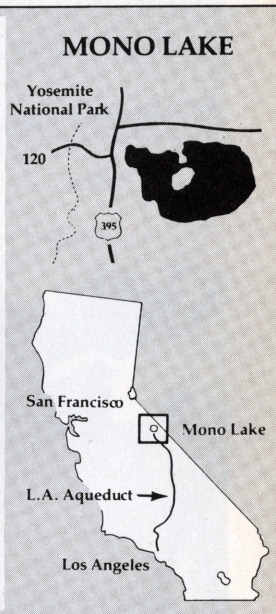

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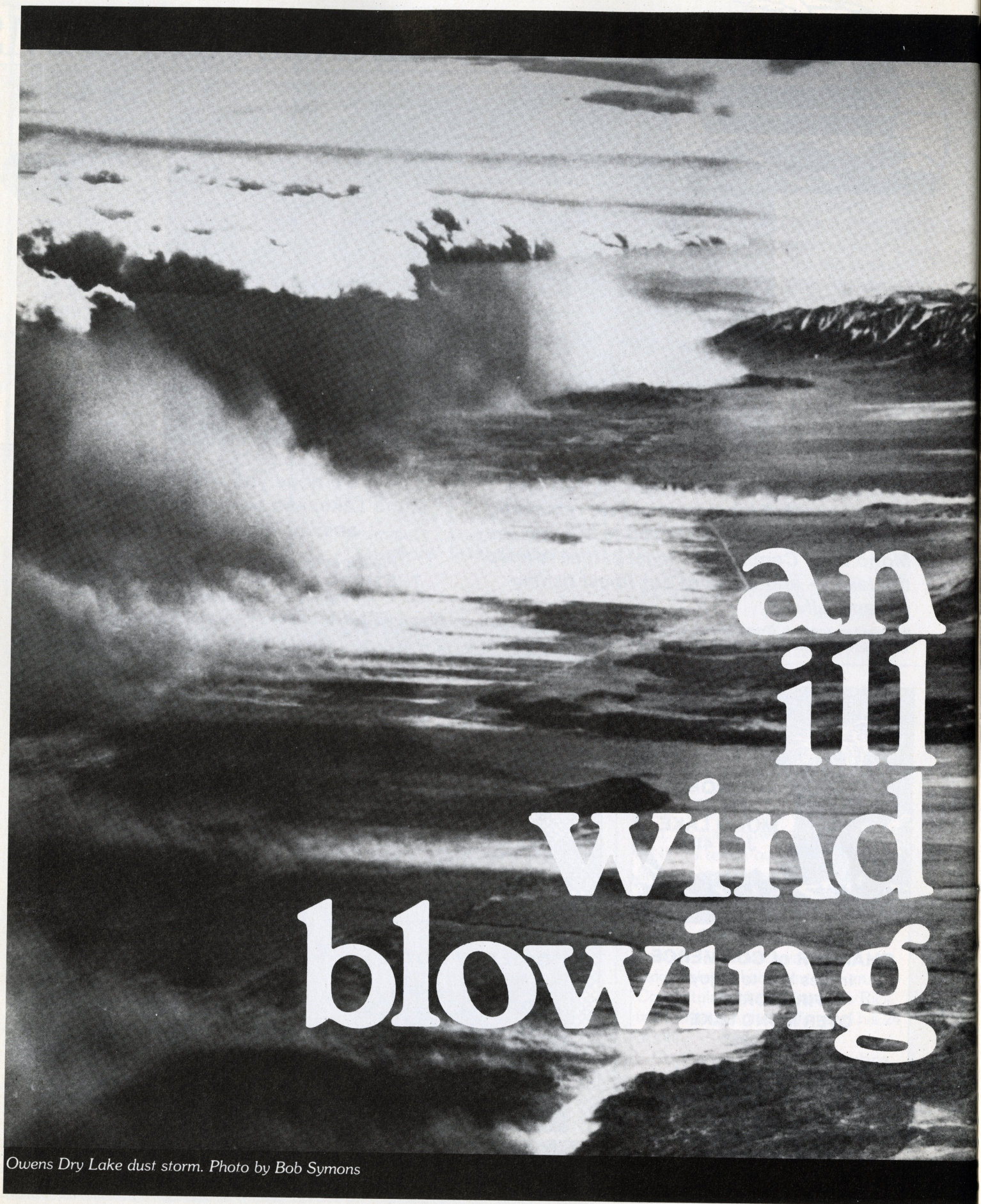
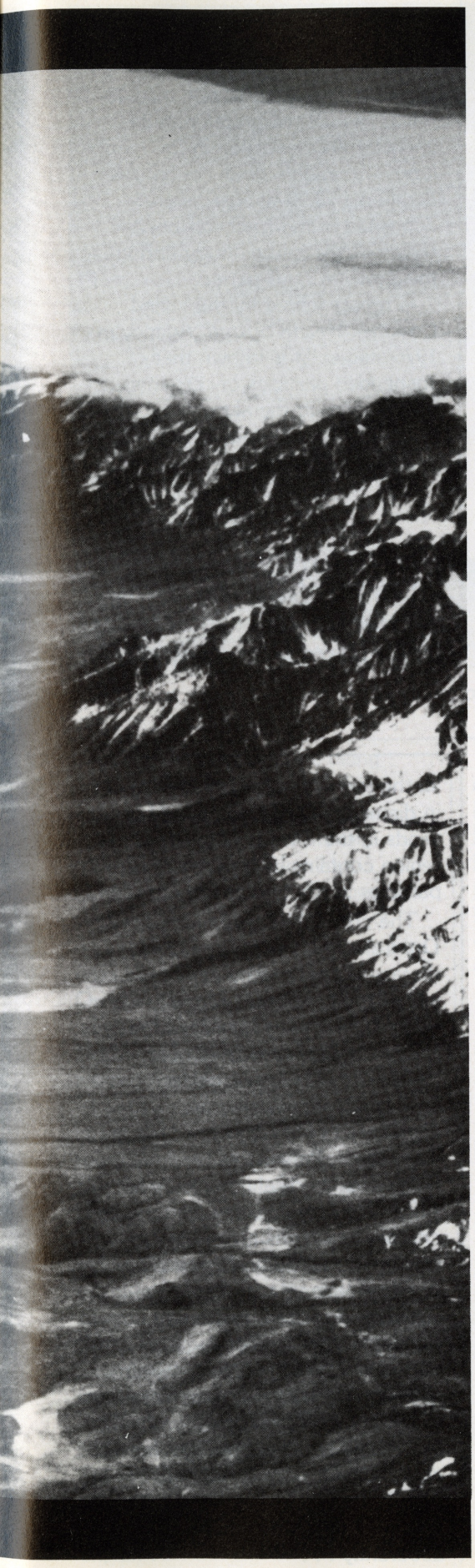


an ill wind blowing

Owens Dry Lake dust storm. Photo by Bob Symons



PART 1 — An investigative report on Owens Dry Lake dust and respiratory disease in Owens Valley.

By Sandie Pramann

The winds came from the south on May 29, 1985. Gusts clocked at 62 mph buffeted Owens Valley. I sat alone in my car parked near Keeler at the north end of Owens Dry Lake. I had come to witness an "Owens Dry Lake Dust Storm" firsthand. It looked as though I wouldn't be disappointed. The winds picked up, and a huge cloud of white dust began forming over the lakebed. It appeared to be fed by "tornado like" plumes spiraling skyward from the lake's surface. I rolled up my window even though the temperature was near 80 degrees, and continued to watch as the cloud grew in size. Within an hour the air was heavy with fine white particles of dust. I could no longer see the mountains a short distance away. Breathing became difficult, and my throat and eyes burned. My nose started to bleed.

I had seen enough. I started the car, the air conditioning giving welcome relief from the oppressive heat, and glanced at the dash. It was covered with a thick layer of fine white dust. I drove back to Bishop thinking about what the residents of Keeler had told me two weeks earlier . . . they were developing respiratory problems, and had noticed damage to the paint on their cars.

Like a paint-by-number picture, the scene was revealing itself. And, with each stroke of the brush, the picture became more frightening.

Owens Dry Lake is located 200 miles north of Los Angeles at the southern end of Owens Valley. As recently as 1911, Owens Lake was a vast inland sea covering an area of 112 square miles. The lake had no outlet and much like Mono Lake to the north, had gradually become saline in nature.

In 1913 the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (LADWP) began diverting surface waters feeding the lake into an aqueduct constructed to carry water to Los Angeles. By 1926, Owens Lake was dry. In its place stood an 88 square mile chemical wasteland.

Five years following the diversion of surface waters, LADWP went on to sink wells into Owens Valley in order to pump groundwater into the aqueduct system. The result has been a continuing drying of Owens Valley. There is speculation that this drying may be permanent since the soil within the valley may be compacting and losing its ability to retain water. If this is true, it will cause a further reduction in vegetation covering the valley floor. This will compound an already serious problem in Owens Valley.

As many as fourteen major dust storms originate at Owens Dry Lake each year. The fine white particles which are picked up by the wind blanket the entire region for several days following storms. The chemical composition of the dust has been analyzed, and the results would make even a die-hard anti-environmentalist a bit squeamish. Chemicals being inhaled by the populace during dust episodes include sodium, aluminum, silicon, sulphur, chlorine, potassium, calcium, iron and high concentrations of sulfate and carbonate radicals. In addition to the alkalis, the dust also contains heavy concentrations of fine clays. These are normally hard to inhale, but Owens Dry Lake dust provides

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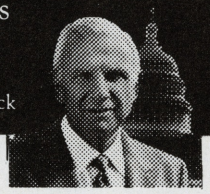

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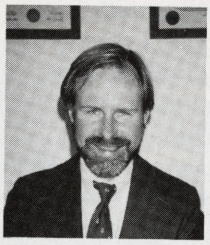

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During severe dust storms, when visibility is reduced to one mile, as much as 6.58 milligrams of dust particles are deposited in the human lungs within a 24 hour period. An additional 13.20 milligrams are deposited in the tracheobronchial region of the human body during the same 24 hour period.

A report issued by the Inland Counties Health System Agency in 1976 states: "It is known that suspended particles of certain sizes are retained in the alvoelae of human lungs with longest retention

"The correlation between Owens Dry Lake dust and respiratory disease appears to be more than speculation."

in the sizes of about 0.5 to 3 microns in diameter. Dust suspended by winds in the Owens Dry Lake region contains high proportions of particles in the 1 to 10 micron size."

The correlation between Owens Dry Lake Dust and respiratory disease appears to be more than speculation. A report recently compiled for the China Lake Naval Weapons Center located near Ridgecrest, California, states: ". . . medical problems are aggravated by the (Owens Dry Lake) dust. Patients at the Ridgecrest medical complex who suffer from emphysema, asthma and chronic bronchitis are subject to increased morbidity. Hospitalization of these patients with bronchial spasm and related pulmonary problems increases during dust episodes. The populace complains of coughing, sneezing, and irritation of the eyes. Psychological problems emerge as some people become apprehensive because of difficulty in breathing. People become annoyed and anxious. Cats behave abberantly . . ."

One of many dust storms advancing on the Ridgecrest, California area.

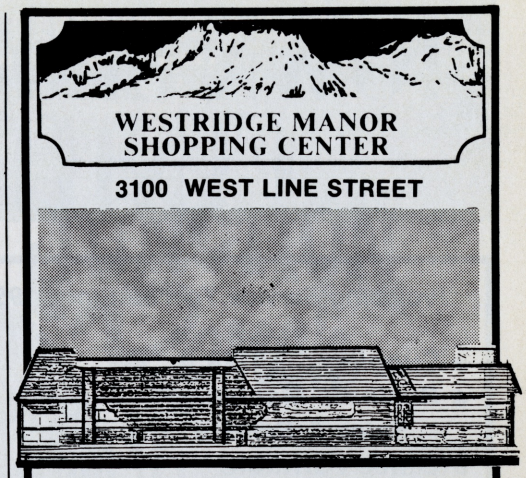
Similar correlations are being made by health professionals in Owens Valley. Gilbert Rodrigues, M.D., specializes in respiratory patient care at Northern Inyo Hospital in Bishop. Dr. Rodrigues is seeing a much higher number of people with lung disease, per capita, than he did while practicing in Orange County. "Half of all patients admitted to intensive care at Northern Inyo Hospital have lung related problems, and 60% to 70% of all patients admitted for routine surgery have moderate to moderately severe lung disease," Dr. Rodrigues stated in a recent interview. He went on to say, "Respiratory related illnesses are overwhelming the medical resources of this community. The dust from Owens Dry Lake is a tremendous threat to an already compromised lung patient, and those suffering from emphysema grow much worse in Owens Valley." Dr. Rodrigues stressed that elderly lung patients are the ones who suffer most. "They are financially trapped in Owens Valley and can't leave," he explained.

When asked his recommendations on making the public aware of the severity of the problem, Dr. Rodrigues said, "I believe that the Inyo County Board of Supervisors must declare to the public that we have a potential crisis here in Owens Valley. Residents must know what Owens Dry Lake dust is doing to their health." He also recommended that "Warnings" be issued when Owens Dry Lake particulates are in the air.

Dr. Rodrigues has lived in Owens Valley four years. As we concluded our interview, he said, "I'm already feeling the effects of Owens Dry Lake dust." He is not alone.

On March 4 and 5, 1987, major wind storms blanketed the Bishop area with Owens Dry Lake dust. Respiratory problems increased dramatically in the Bishop area following these storms. Local pharmacists, who fill prescriptions for lung related illnesses, describe respiratory problems as "epidemic" in Owens Valley.

Inyo County officials apparently are not taking the problem seriously. Although "Significant Harm To



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Health" levels of air pollution, as established by State and Federal guidelines, have been exceeded on numerous occassions, warnings are not being issued to the public.

Inyo County Supervisors have been aware of potential health hazards associated with Owens Dry Lake dust since 1976. Completely aware of health risks, they approved a major development which will attract 2,000 full-time residents to the north shore of Owens Dry Lake.

In July 1985, our staff obtained a copy of the Environmental Impact Report (EIR) prepared for this project. We analyzed the report paying particular attention to air quality monitored by the Great Basin Unified Air Pollution Control District (GBUAPCD) near the project site. In comparing data included in the EIR with data provided by the GBUAPCD, we found several descrepencies. Some of the most severe pollution levels monitored near the project site had been omitted from the EIR.

"Why would we try to cover it up? We included everything Chuck Fryxell gave us, and if he say's we didn't, he's a liar."

. . . Dan Beats

In order to find an explanation for these omissions, we contacted Dan Beats. Beats, who is currently employed by Inyo County, was employed by a private engineering firm at the time he prepared the EIR for project developer, Arland Dunn. We asked this question: "In going over the Dunn project, we've found that data provided to you by GBUAPCD was omitted from the EIR. Can you explain this?" Beats replied, "Why would we try to cover it up? We included everything Chuck Fryxell gave us, and if he says we didn't, he's a liar."

We then contacted Chuck Fryxell. Fryxell was head of GBUAPCD in Bishop at the time the Dunn EIR was prepared. He was

one of the first to suspect a link between Owens Dry Lake dust and respiratory disease in Owens Valley. When told of Beats' comment, Fryxell stated, "Dan Beats was given the same information you have. If this information is missing from the EIR, it's obvious to me that it was left out intentionally."

The Dunn project and Owens Dry Lake are located in Inyo County's 5th Supervisorial District. Supervisor Robert Bremmer represents the people of the 5th District. It is the residents of this area, present and future, who may suffer the most severe damage as a result of breathing Owens Dry Lake dust. Bremmer has offered unquestioning support of the Dunn project even though 2,000 people may be exposed to serious health risks. His support of the project may be explained by a desire for economic growth in his district. Another possible explanation could be a substantial campaign contribution made to Bremmer in the 1984 election. The contribution came from a company called Traditional Industries. Traditional Industries is owned by project developer, Arland Dunn.

"Dan Beats was given the same information you have. If this information is missing from the EIR, it's obvious to me that it was left out intentionally."

. . . Chuck Fryxell

An Ill Wind Blowing will continue in the July/August 1987 issue of Sierra Life. Our continuing investigation will expose the "Power" behind the problem and why hundreds of cases of lung disease may develop before a solution is found.

This series of articles is dedicated to my father who is suffering from emphysema. His illness was caused by breathing alkali dust intermittently over a ten year period of his life. If we can prevent just one case of lung disease, the political pressures encountered in preparing this series will have been worth it.

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The First 43 Miles Are The Hardest

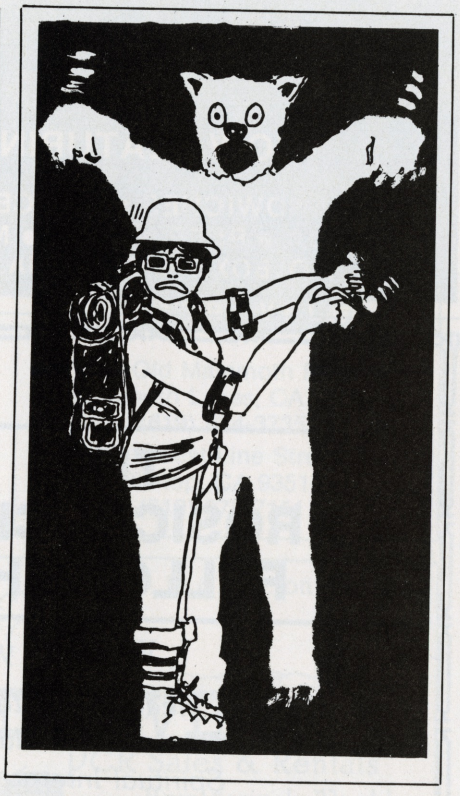
What Happens When a Sheltered, Middle-Class, Mildly Neurotic 33-Year-Old Embarks On Her First Backpacking Trip?

By Patricia Patterson

When my friend Stuart invited me to go on a seven-day backpacking trip into the Sierra Nevada, my first instinct was to politely decline. I am, after all, what could be called a Protestant Princess. There was a time when I required a nap after a trip to the grocery store, and I once made my father drive six miles to flush a terminally ill goldfish because I couldn't bear to touch it . . . even with a net. "Adventure" to me meant trying to make it to work and back on a quarter tank of gas. So, even though I knew better, I agreed to accompany Stuart and his friend Richard, and before I knew it I found myself shopping in stores with tents pitched in the middle of them, patronized by people who could distinquish Gore-Tex from polypro.

First of all, let me tell you that it costs more to go on a one-week backpacking trip than it does to spend a week on the French Riviera. I spent more on my hiking boots than I did on my wedding dress. Then I proceeded to lay out another hundred dollars or so on woolen socks and long underwear, and alpine sunglasses and a safari hat which, when worn together, made me look like Teddy Roosevelt.

I had consented to go on the trip on one condition: That there be no bears Stuart had assured me it would be too cold or too damp or too late in the season for bears, and



I, like an imbecile, believed him. When we arrived at King's Canyon National Park wherein lurked the 43-mile Rae Lakes Loop, our destination, I noticed that the garbage cans looked like they were built to contain radioactive waste materials. They were fortresses of lead and steel bolted solidly to concrete platforms. That was my first inkling that I had bitten off more than I could chew, and I fervently hoped the bears weren't intent on doing the same.

Our first morning on the trail started without a hitch. We were a party of three — Stuart, a self-proclaimed Renaissance man, Richard, a botanists who wore tie-dyed T-shirts and said "yahoo" a lot, and me. I had practiced hiking by carrying heavy books, and when we got to the trailhead I was relieved to hoist my backpack and discover that it weighed right around 32 pounds, my practice load. Then we stopped to fill our water containers. Do you know how much water weighs? (That's a rhetorical question, of course, but I've discovered that people who backpack regularly can accurately answer questions like that, and other questions that no one really wants answered.) All I know is that my filled water bottle felt like a car radiator strapped to my hip, and I began the hike with an uneven gait reminiscent of Dennis Weaver's "Chester" on *Gunsmoke*.

The first part of the trail wound with deceptive ease through lush green meadows past the sparkling King's River. As I walked, I was lulled into a false sense of capability, and I was just beginning to plan my Everest trip when suddenly a boy of about eleven came pounding down the trail, panting and pointing behind him, yelling, "There's a bear on the trail about a half mile up!" Underestimating the determination of two nature-lovers who had

planned this trip for six months, I assumed we would immediately turn around, get in the car, and drive back to the safety of a city full of muggers. It wasn't to be. Stuart seemed unperturbed.

"Okay," he whispered, "get your Sierra Club cups and spoons, and if we see him, we'll bang on our cups and scare him away."

Now I was no expert, but it seemed to me that the sight of three suburbanites playing percussion on tin cups in the face of a 500-pound bear would hardly "scare" him. Nevertheless, I clutched my place-setting and marched onward and upward toward the jaws of death. In my mind's eye I could see headlines like, "Woman Tries To Fight Off Killer Bear With Spoon, Remains Found In Three Counties."

Suddenly Stuart shouted, "There he is!" and we were all banging our cups and whooping and hollering and, unbelievably, I watched as the bear turned and ran away from us. A *bear* ran away from *me*! Well, I thought, that's one less thing to be afraid of: apparently, Sierra Nevada bears are wimps.

About the fourth day on the trail I was getting pretty cocky. I had terrorized a bear, eaten food cooked in a coffee can, and had shared my morning bath with a water snake, and I was beginning to think the Donner Party women had been a bunch of crybabies. That's when we started gaining elevation, and it got cold. Bitterly cold. The verdant meadows gave way to bleak landscape of granite and dead trees, the harshness relieved now and then by a tuft of grass and a patch of half-frozen wildflowers which backpackers have imagination enough to call "alpine meadows."

We were hiking that afternoon when suddenly the wind kicked up and dark clouds started forming. Stuart and Richard began considering campsites for the night, and finally settled on a smooth granite mesa. Surveying our surroundings, I realized that every single tree on the ledge had been struck by lightning in its lifetime, so that we were in a kind of forest of

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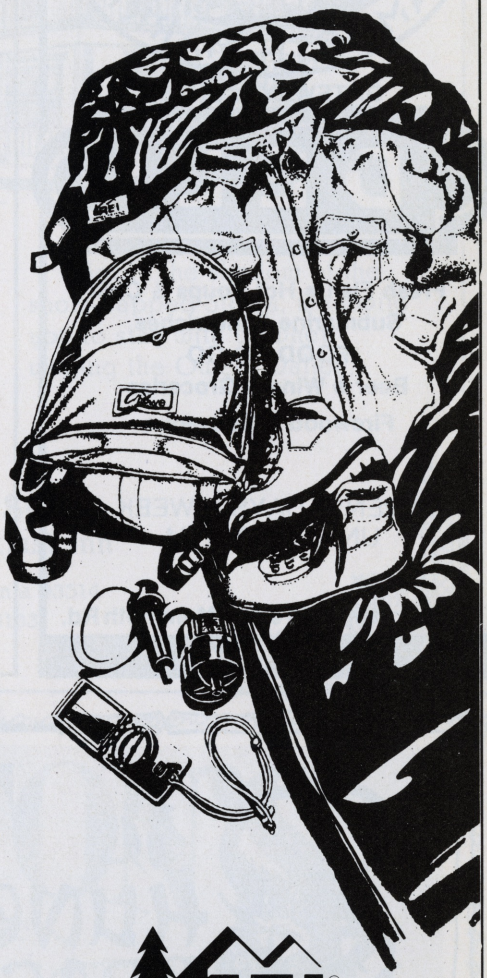

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four-foot high blackened stumps. As the sky grew darker, I found myself slouching around the camp casting furtive glances at the thunderheads, trying not to be the highest object on the mountain. I longed for a campfire for warmth and cheer, but we were above 10,000 feet now, where backpackers are no longer allowed to make fires. (That's a Forest Service rule. They tell you it's because of the scarcity of timber, but they don't tell you it's because the lightning fires have burned up whatever the merciless cold will allow to grow.) Stuart and Richard, in the meantime, strolled about appreciating nature, extolling the beauty of this incredible fern and that exquisite pine cone. The trip was a little more than half over, and if I heard one more exclamation of the miracle of nature's handiwork, I was going to be sick — even at the risk of losing my Freeze-Dried Mushroom-and-Rice-Pilaf

"At first I couldn't believe it. I had survived so much, and now I was going to die like a character in Bambi."

Instant Dinner (High Carbohydrate.)

By lunchtime Tuesday, we were heading down the mountain and decided to stop at Bullfrog Lake to eat the remaining peanut butter and broken crackers. (I noticed that whoever named the natural wonders of the Sierra Nevada chose innocent-sounding names like Bullfrog Lake and Glen Pass. They couldn't have called a spade a spade, or those places would have names like "Giardia Lake" and "Shin Splint Pass.") I was just thinking how much I'd endured when we smelled smoke. Forest fire smoke. At first I couldn't believe it. I had survived so much, and now I was going to die like a character in *Bambi*.

"Do you think it might just be someone's campfire?" I asked hopefully, as great clouds of smoke rose from the canyon floor, threatening to obscure Stuart and Richard from my vision. As the smoke grew thicker, even my brave

friends, seasoned backpackers who were accoustomed to facing death hourly, allowed as how we should pack up and mosey on down the mountain. While they painstakingly rewrapped the food (as if we would live to eat another meal!), I flung my gear into my pack like Prissy leaving Atlanta in *Gone With The Wind*.

To this day, I don't know what the last last ten miles of the Rae Lakes Loop looks like. I saw it, but at breakneck speed through peripheral vision. Despite the choking smoke and the fact that we did not know where the fire was, Stuart and Richard continued as they had begun, stopping to "ooh" and "ahh" over rocks and berries and mistletoe, while I danced on one foot and then the other.

Well, despite their lollygagging, we did manage to make it down the mountain in record time. I think I startled a couple of rangers back at the trailhead who had apparently never before seen anyone on hands and knees kissing an asphalt parking lot. I'm still making monthly payments to the doctor who treated both my knees for patellar tendonitis. (He said going down a mountain ten miles and 2,000 feet in one day wasn't a real smart thing to do.) The sunburn finally healed. (I didn't use sunscreen that last day — who would have thought that ultraviolet rays could penetrate all that smoke?) I took three showers upon arriving home and I haven't touched peanut butter since September. I still have the urge to run when I smell woodsmoke, but my therapist says I'm making progress. In fact, now that I think about it, it wasn't so bad . . . maybe this summer . . . after all, I do have those fancy Italian hiking boots and I have to get my money's worth, don't I? Besides, there's a ten-mile stretch of the Rae Lakes Loop I've yet to see, and I'll bet it's absolutely beautiful . . . □

"I think I startled a couple of rangers who had apparently never before seen anyone kissing an asphalt parking lot.

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Erick Schat . . . Happier Times

By Mike Martell

Erick Schat's Bakery in Bishop, California has been a familiar landmark since 1962. The bakery was founded by Jack Schat, Sr., an immigrant from Holland, who settled in Bishop with $300 in his pocket and a job as a temporary worker in a bakery.

"Papa" Jack, as he was often called, and wife Kine eventually established their own bakery and acquired the patent to *Sheepherder Bread* which soon became a household word to people living or visiting in the Bishop area. After years of dedication, "Papa" Jack and Kine retired, relinquishing their share of the business to sons Erick and Dan.

There were years of growth, change and progress which followed. During this time, Erick focused his attention on the wholesale end of the business. "I was involved for many years in wholesales," recalls Erick, "In fact we used to deliver to 1,720 supermarkets in three states," he says, "I was continually on the road making contacts, presenting products, helping with store displays and promotions. The hours were long and the work demanding, leaving little time for family or for what I love doing most . . . baking."

The stress created by a rapidly expanding business eventually caused differences of opinion in management, and in 1982, a split was made in the company. The wholesale operation was retained by Dan, while Erick purchased the retail store in Bishop from the corporation. "Papa" Jack came out of retirement to lend his unique talents as a Master Baker toward the development of the pastry department in the retail store. His death in 1984 was a terrible loss to friends and family and the many customers who had come to appreciate his creative specialties over the years.

Erick has found a happier way of life these past few years. A way of life which allows him to focus his energy on creating many new products which have been well received by the public.

There were some turbulent times, and ongoing conflicts within the family, which ended with Dan leaving the area for an independent life in Southern California. Older brother Jack, Jr., moved to Bishop from Santa Barbara and took over responsibility for wholesale operations as well as retail outlets in Lone Pine, Mammoth and June Lake.

In remembering the former stress of long distance wholesale involvements, and the compromises in quality of product in order to meet production and shipping schedules, Erick admits, "I've found the best thing I ever did was to go back to just the retail operation. I'm not involved with wholesale anymore. I have no trucks, and my only emphasis these days is on quality products."

Since acquiring the Bishop retail operation, Erick has returned to the baking methods used by the family in the early years. The bakery, located across the street from the Bishop City Park on Main Street, looks as though it came directly from a Dutch postcard. In the spring, colorful tulips bloom in front of the store adding to the "Old World" charm.

Erick has found a happier way of life these past few years. A way of

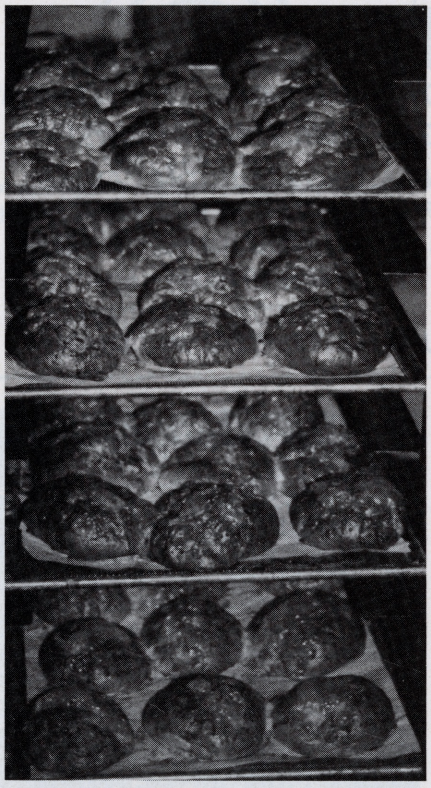
life which allows him to focus his energy on creating many new products which have been well received by the public. He admits that he developed his now famous cheesebread through a mistake. "I bought a ton of cheese and didn't know what to do with it," he recalls, "So we came out with ten products using cheese. The public liked three of those products and we continue to produce them." The cheesebread produced by the company has become so popular that people are often found waiting in line for it to come out of the oven. Harrah's of Reno and Lake Tahoe, recently sent their airplane to Bishop to pick up a load of this famous bread.

"*Sheepherder Bread* is still very popular," say Erick, "It was developed by the sheepherders who came through Owens Valley, and we sort of inherited it." To give the bread its unique flavor, it is baked in a stone hearth oven. Erick tried baking it in modern ovens and wasn't happy with the results, so three years ago he had a new stone hearth oven shipped from Holland. "It's really an advanced piece of equipment which utilizes the old fashioned stone," Erick explains, " Very few bakers use the stone hearth oven these days because it requires a great deal of manual labor, but to make a product like *Sheepherder Bread*, it's the only way."

Erick recently began growing his own Chileano peppers which are used in some of his products. He is often seen riding his tractor through his field of peppers. "I think it's good for a man's soul to be out there planting and growing in the sunshine," he says. With the success of his pepper crop, he is now studying the possibility of growing his own wheat in Owens Valley for use in Schat's products. "Wonderful wheat was once grown in the Bishop area," says Erick, "We've done it on a small scale with success. The milling of wheat is important today. The big milling operations are destroying the vitamins in wheat by running it through high speed rollers and exposing it to extreme heat. We eventually want to grow the wheat and mill it ourselves in order to retain the vitamin content."

While involved in the complexities of wholesales, Erick found that he was losing touch with his products — becoming too involved with the stress involved in running a large operation. "We used to have such pressure," he explains, "Financial pressure from growing too fast. I don't believe in all these banks and mortgages and payments anymore. That's not the way to live."

Erick enjoys the warm relationships he has with his employees and considers them all "family." He speaks fondly of wife Shea, "Without her support none of this would be possible."



. . . cheesebread produced by the company has become so popular that people are often found waiting in line for it to come out of the oven. Harrah's of Reno and Lake Tahoe recently sent their airplane to pick up a load of this famous bread.

By returning to what he loves doing most — baking and meeting the public — Erick has freed himself of stress and allowed the creativity of his art to return. Schat's products are made from scratch each day. "I still crack eggs," says Erick, "We use 15,000 fresh eggs every month." Muffins have become the latest craze, following croissants. Both are regular parts of production each day. "We're probably one of the few bakeries still making donuts from scratch," says Erick, "We make them just before the bakery opens each day. The key to a good donut is to get it to your customer fresh from the oven. A donut is only good for about six hours." Bread, one the other hand, can be shipped to customers, and mail orders have become a growing segment of Ericks's retail operation.

Erick believes in a humbler lifestyle than that he found himself living a few years ago. He says the key to staying humble is making sourdough bread. "Every time you make it," he says, "It's like a wiley woman — you never get your hands on them! Not many bakers make sourdough these days, it's just too tough." Erick says one of the most important ingredients in his breads is the water. "Bishop has wonderful water," he says, " It has a fairly high PH level which is excellent for making bread."

Erick Schat's retail operation is one of the few like it in this country. In a world of specialization, few people want to become involved in a complex operation such as his. It is like an orchestra with everyone playing a different tune . . . cookies, bread, candy . . . each one made independent of the other, and yet when you walk into the bakery, all the tunes come together in a well-orchestrated masterpiece. It's enough to make you forget those silly ideas about dieting . . . after all, a good donut lasts only six hours.□

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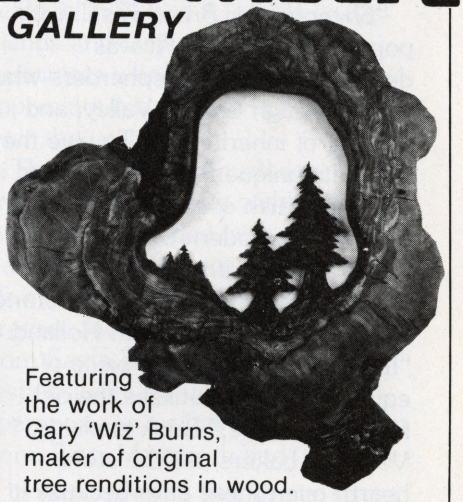

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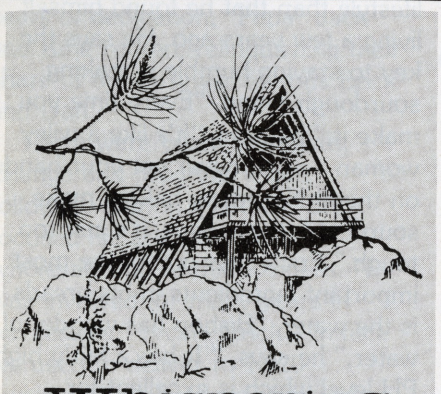

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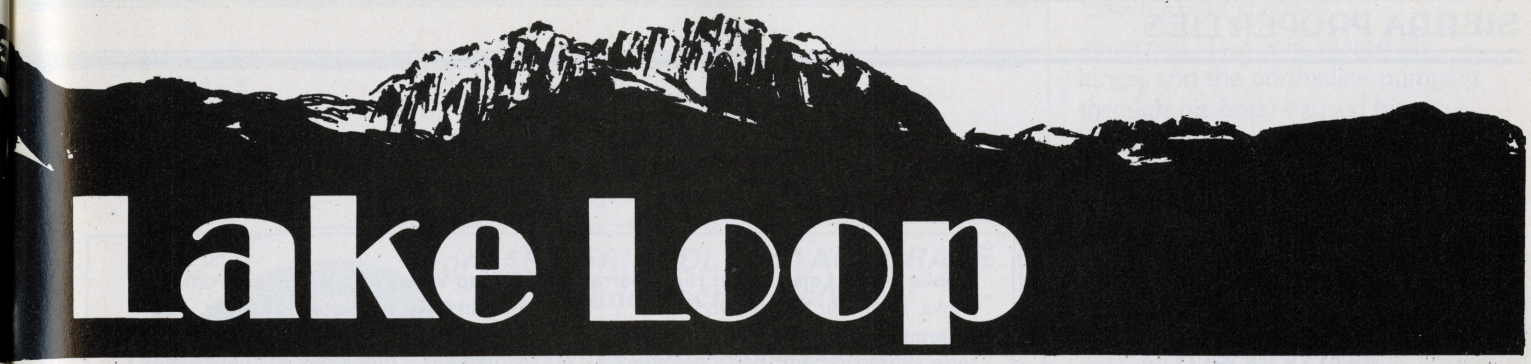

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Speed Freak *continued . . .*

abnormal. The cold seared his lungs, and the adrenaline pumping through his body caused him to hyperventilate.

Using Yoga techniques, he slowed his breathing, then side-stepped into place. The flags that defined the track looked ridiculously close together, and he wondered for a moment if there wasn't some mistake.

He secured his helmet, took another deep breath and pushed off — skate, skate, skate — then dropped into a tight tuck. His speed rose above 100 mph, 110, 115 . . . To those standing near the track, McKinney looked like a blur and sounded like an atlas missile. To McKinney himself, all was still and quiet. A touch of Nirvana.

SQUAW VALLEY, CALIFORNIA 1986: McKinney who is currently separated from his wife, sits alone in his darkened living room. He is still alert, fired by a life force that smolders but never dies. Even at 3:00 A.M. he gives off heat.

The moon rises above the mountains, reflecting light off the snow-flecked granite, bathing Steve in moon strokes. He tries to relax his mind, but it defies him. He thinks of his next adventure: the French Alps next year where he will attempt to break the world record by skiing at 130 mph.

The thought is exciting to him. What about the fear? Don't deny the fear. Instead accept it and transform it . . . use it.

What's really inconceivable, he thinks, is that most people live their entire lives as prisoners in their own comfort zones. Nothing risked, nothing lost . . . or gained.

He recalls a line from a book called *Inner Skiing*: "If we never accept challenges, we are left in the dark about all but our most superficial resources."

McKinney is so nourished by his risk taking, by his frequent confrontations with fear, he wonders: What do other people live on? □

THE GREAT QUAKE OF 1872

On March 26, 1872 the earth began to shake under Owens Valley . . . it would be one of the most devastating earthquakes in California's history.

by Rick Ridgeway

Between two and three o'clock Tuesday morning last, the inhabitants of this region experienced one of the most terror-striking, awe-inspiring sensations that ever falls to the lot of mortal man — an earthquake . . .

So begins the headline story of the *Inyo Independent*, March 30, 1872. It is a wonder editor P.A. Chalfant was able to salvage the press from the ruins of his newspaper's office to print that edition. Four days earlier, on March 26, the Owens Valley had been devastated by an earthquake that today is still one of the strongest recorded in California's history.

Lone Pine was hardest hit of any town in the valley. Out of a population of little more than 250, thirty percent were dead or injured, and only seven of the town's fifty-nine buildings escaped damage or total destruction.

The night of the earthquake began cold and quiet. A strong wind had for several days buffeted the valley, but the air was now calm, and a brilliant full moon illuminated the snow-laced Sierra Nevada.

One survivor said it started as a far-off rumble — like distant railroad cars crossing a trestle bridge. The ground began shaking. Then it heaved so violently that those who tried to run outdoors were thrown to the ground and had to crawl. One man described it as trying to stand in a rowboat pitching in heavy seas.

In less than one minute Lone Pine was in ruins. For the survivors, the rest of the night was terror. Many people, unable to pull themselves from the rubble, lay buried for hours. Women and children huddled together in a frame house that was one of the few buildings still standing. The ground continued to shake throughout the night — children cried and Mexican and Chilean women recited Ave Marias. The men, most dressed only in nightshirts, spent the freezing night digging through the adobe ruins for the dead and injured.

The next morning the sun filtered through a pall of dust several hundred feet high. Lone Pine resembled a town bombed by a modern air raid. When all the bodies were excavated the death count was twenty-three.

Nineteen were buried in a common grave. They represented the ethnic mixture of early California: Irish, Chilean, French, Mexicans and native-born Americans. Today the grave site, one mile north of Lone Pine, is a

California State Historical Landmark.

Almost everyone counted among the dead either a friend or a relative. Manuel Ybaceta, immigrant Chilean, a hard worker who ran a small butcher shop, was crushed by debris. Charles Meysan and his wife Madeleine, immigrants from France and four-year residents of Lone Pine, lost their eleven-year-old daughter when she was crushed by debris. Maria Tarrazona, immigrant from Mexico, a widow, and her three children were all crushed to death.

Manuel Ybaceta's butcher shop, Charles Meysan's general store, Munzinger and Lubken's brewery, George Burkhardt's blacksmith shop, Charles P. Begole's saloon, J.H. Stratton's barbershop — all completely destroyed.

That wasn't the end of it. Aftershocks continued to jolt the Owens Valley for months. Said one resident, "Every little while that familiar rumble broke through the night stillness . . . (it was) one long nightmare."

The rest of the Owens Valley, while not hit as hard as Lone Pine, still suffered considerable damage. In Independence the two-story county courthouse, which had been built only four years earlier for the then-high cost of $9,800, toppled to the ground. A sleeping county clerk and undersheriff, caught inside, were unable to run out. It was fortunate since the brick walls fell outward; had they made it outside they probably would have been buried.

The majority of the region's population in 1872 were Mexican and Chilean, and most of the buildings were constructed of adobe. In Lone Pine not one of the adobe buildings was left standing. The only structures that weathered the quake were a few wooden frame houses. One of these was the Edwards house in Independence. Built in 1863, it is still in good condition and can be seen just off the main street.

Little was recorded about how the Owens Valley's Paiute Indians fared during the earthquake. The Indians had an oral tradition that told of a great earthquake which had centuries before created Owens Valley from what was originally a large inland sea. They believed that the 1872 earthquake was only a prelude to a worse convulsion that would destroy the valley entirely. Many of them packed up and left.

The freakish phenomena that followed the earthquake no doubt caused much of the Indian's apprehension. The *Inyo Independent* reported: "Fissures in the earth are numerous and extend all over the valley — vast crevasses have been opened, new lakes formed, sinks from ten inches to twenty feet are covering acre after acre, cracks extending miles, the river partially dammed and turned, and foothills . . . rent with wide cracks!" Several crevasses tapped underground streams that gushed to the surface. A geyser fountained out of the middle of Lake Owens, caused by a steam fissure on the lake's bottom.

Evidence of the earthquake is still visible in the Owens Valley. In one place the Owens River changed course, forming a new lake and drowning all the trees in the area. The lake has since dried up, but four miles north of town, on the east side of Highway 395, the decaying trunks of trees still stand as testimony of the flooding.

Surface faulting along the fault line created miles of scarps which can be seen plainly today. Ironically, one of the better places to view the scarps is from the top of the mass grave for earthquake victims just north of Lone Pine. Looking west, toward the Alabama Hills, you can spot a long embankment ten to

"In Independence the two-story county courthouse, which had been built only four years earlier for the then-high cost of $9,800, toppled to the ground."

Drawings dipicting the disaster appeared in the San Francisco Chronicle.

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fifteen feet high. It doesn't look like much, but it wasn't there before 1872.

Owens Valley residents weren't the only people to feel the quake. John Muir ran out of his small cabin in Yosemite Valley when the ground rumbled, shouting, "A noble earthquake! A noble earthquake!" He watched by the light of the full moon as Eagle Rock, a large formation on the south wall, avalanched to the valley's floor. Muir described the spectacle as an "arc of glowing, passionate fire, fifteen-hundred-feet high in span, as true in form and as serene in beauty as a rainbow in the midst of a stupendous, roaring rockstorm."

Muir was so enthralled by the spectacle that he spent the night crawling over huge boulders that had fallen to the valley floor, listening to them "chafing, grating against one another, groaning, and whispering . . . settling into their places."

Earthquakes so often conjure up images of destruction and death that Muir's account is refreshing.

The earthquake also had its humor. The *Inyo Independent* reported that one young gentleman was "setting up with his inamorata at the dead hour of 2:30 A.M. when the big shock came. The young lady, as in duty bound, fainted away. Our Adonis held her in his arms until she recovered, which required many minutes. The next day he swore he would give $20 a shot for earthquakes when setting up with an offish gal." Another report from Marysville told of two men who got into a fight when the earthquake moved their billiard balls, giving one of them what the other thought to be an unfair advantage.

Though the epicenter of the earthquake is estimated to have been a few miles out of Lone Pine, reports of the tremor came from places even farther away than Marysville: Oregon, Utah, Arizona, Baja California. Walls collapsed in Visalia: an iron column on the Capitol in Sacramento broke; in Los Angeles people were thrown from their beds and fled into the streets.

There were no instruments to measure the strength of the Inyo earthquake — seismographs weren't introduced until 1887. But other methods exist. Because it is known that walls collapsed in Visalia, and that plaster cracked in Chico, scientists can estimate, with reasonable accuracy, the strength of the earthquake on these areas. By collecting all such information available — most of it gathered from old newspaper accounts — a map can be constructed showing the intensity of the earthquake at varying distances from the epicenter. Areas of equal intensity are then connected by what are called isoseismal lines that form irregular circles which spread out concentrically from the epicenter. This map is then compared to similar maps of more recent earthquakes which have been measured by instruments.

By using this method (Modified Mercalli scale), Dr. Clarence Allen of Cal Tech estimates the Inyo Earthquake of 1872 at 7.8. The Fort Tejon earthquake of 1857 is estimated at 7.9, using this method. In terms of intensity (shaking), the Inyo earthquake was greater than the quake in the Fort Tejon area.

Geologists are still undecided about the cause of earthquakes. In 1872 much less was known, and the Inyo earthquake produced a plethora of theories. One local man observed a brilliant shooting star the night of the earthquake, and he claimed it no doubt had something to do with the subsequent calamity. A more common theory explained earthquakes as electrical in origin. One newspaper reporter, with somewhat dubious logic, stated that since "earthquakes are electrical in origin, they (someday) can be controlled and disseminated by iron conductors with as much ease and certainty as we now control the telegraph or the steam engine."

Not all speculation was so wild. Professor Joseph Le Conte of the University of California was much closer when, in 1872, he said the Inyo earthquake was associated with movement in the earth's crust. P.A. Chalfant, editor of the *Inyo*

Independent, held the same opinion, and made an erudite prediction that when such crustal movements are someday better understood, earthquakes will be predicted, and damage caused by them lessened.

Chalfant may have been right. In February 1975, the Chinese successfully predicted an earthquake that shook the city of Haicheng. By evacuating most of the population five hours before the earthquake struck, it is estimated that thousands of lives were saved. The previous year scientists in Menlo Park had held a meeting in which they observed that all the signs indicated that an earthquake would soon hit the Hollister area. Within hours a temblor, measuring 5.2 on the Richter scale, broke windows and toppled grocery store shelves.

The technology for predicting earthquakes, however, is not yet developed enough to warrant formal predictions. There is even speculation whether such predictions would be beneficial. It has been argued that the panic following an earthquake warning might cause more damage than the actual earthquake itself.

Many psychologists believe that the threat of earthquakes strikes some raw, primal nerve. Analyst James Kirsch says, "The earth is basic to us. We stand on it. Our roots are on it. We call it 'terra firma.' This is why an earthquake is much more terrifying than a flood or a tornado."

For many of the residents of Owens Valley, the Great Inyo Earthquake was the most memorable event of their lives. Eva Lee Gunn, in an interview published in *Westways* in 1941, said she had lived near Lone Pine since the town's beginning; that she had lived the drama of a frontier community taking roots and growing into a healthy town. "I have witnessed every act of that drama," she said, "and if I were asked to name the most exciting event of those seven decades, my answer would be, it was the great earthquake of March 26, 1872." □

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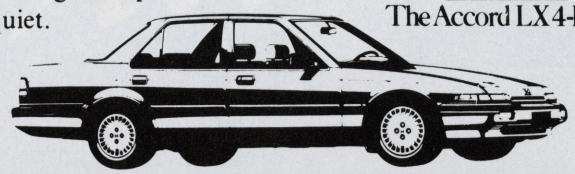

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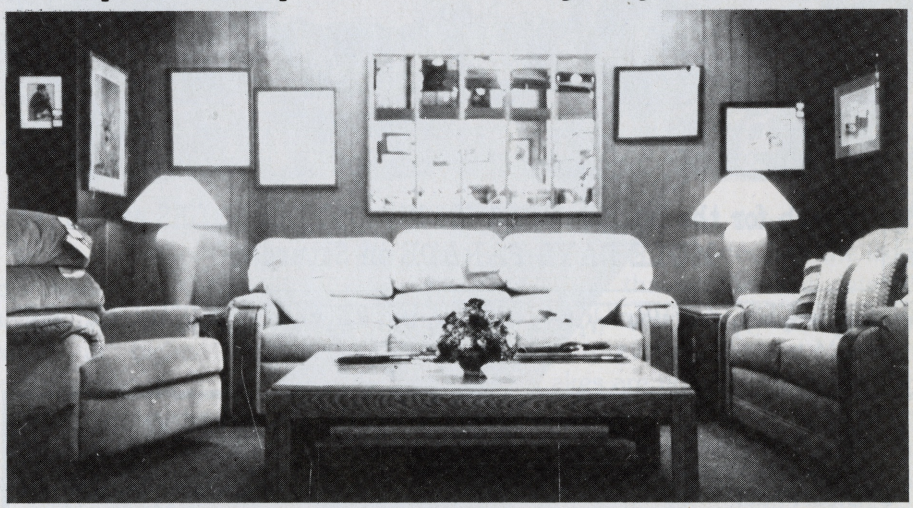

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MAY

16 — St. Jude Bike-A-Thon, Mammoth
22-25 — Mule Days, Bishop
23-24 — N.H.P.A. Sanctioned Horse Shoe Pitching Tournament, Millpond — Bishop

JUNE

20-21 — Plumline Mountain Bike Races, Bishop
20-21 — Old Timers Moto Cross
26-28 — Twentieth Annual Moto Cross
27 — Eastern Sierra Water Ski Association Slalom Tournament, Crowley Lake

JULY

4 — Fireworks,
Over Mono Lake
Crowley Lake
Bishop
Independence
July 4th Parade, Mammoth
9-12 — Mammoth Open Tennis Tournament
16-19 — Tri County Fair, Bishop
22-26 — Whiskey Creek Stage Race
24-25 — Sierra Summer Festival Begins a Series of Weekend Concerts
25 — Eastern Sierra Water Ski Association Slalom Tournament
28-29 — High Sierra Musical Theatre, Broadway Musical, Bishop
31-Aug 2 — High Sierra Musical Theatre, Broadway Musical, Mammoth Lakes

AUGUST

1 — Mammoth Snowcreek Triathlon
2-8 — Sierra Summer Festival, Classical Week, Mammoth
5 — Sierra Summer Festival, Chamber Ensemble, Mammoth
8 — McDonald's/Mammoth Lion's Club Annual 10K Run
8 — Sierra Summer Festival, presents "Ishi"
15-17 — Tournament of Racquets, Snowcreek Athletic Club; Mammoth Cycling Classic, Mammoth Mountain Kamikaze
21-22 — Sierra Summer Festival 50's Weekend
21-23 — 1987 Norba World Championships, Mountain Bike Competition
22-23 — Mammoth Open Water Ski Tournament
29 — Mule Run Ultra 50K Race, Bishop
29 — Fourth Annual Charthouse 10K Road Run, Mammoth Lakes

The Reluctant Aviators

By Julia Yost and Ian Connellan

Stop a moment and think about balloonists. What comes to your mind? Old leather flying helmets . . . around the world in eighty days (with David Niven in full evening dress, of course) . . . good shoestring, penny-budget flying. None of these images are really far from the truth.

Although ballooning has become a slightly more predictable science with the advent of modern aeronautical instruments, it is still an adventure for flying purists. And even today, balloon flight records are broken.

Until early 1986, there had never been an east-west balloon crossing of the central Sierra. The High Sierra Balloon Company of Bishop and Mammoth Lakes, changed that on February 9th of last year . . . although, not intentionally.

Pilots for the balloon company had often discussed the possibility of crossing the Sierra. The shifting winds around Mammoth Lakes, especially at higher elevations, had prompted them to provision their balloons for a trans-Sierra crossing on every flight.

Sunday, February 9, 1986 was an excellent morning for flying. Pilot Dave Metcalf and crewman Joe Juneau, were scheduled to take two of Joe's workmates — Renee' Fontaine and Nerolie Muller — on an early morning, wind mapping flight over Mammoth Lakes. Ballooning was a new experience for Renee' and Nerolie and both had jumped at Joe's offer of a free flight.

Renee' remembers watching the ground crew inflate the 70 foot balloon and prepare it for flight. "We were cold," she says, "Really cold, but also very excited. Not at all frightened."

Just after 7:00 A.M., the balloon lifted off from Mammoth Meadows. It was a crisp morning — minus five degrees — but the crew and passengers were unconcerned about the cold since they would be aloft for only thirty minutes. The balloon rose smoothly to 9,500 feet. It was then, about eight minutes into the flight, that pilot Metcalf detected an unusual westerly airflow (prevailing winds at Mammoth Lakes are nomally easterlies.) The wind collected the balloon and pushed it toward the Sierra. Metcalf decided to ride the air-flow to the Mammoth Lakes basin, where he hoped to land at Twin Lakes or Lake Mary. Tall pine trees obstructed their approach at Lake Mary and Metcalf had no choice but to gain altitude and let the wind push them into the heart of the Sierra back-country. He guided the balloon up to 9,000 feet to cross Mammoth Pass. Once across the pass, another attempt was

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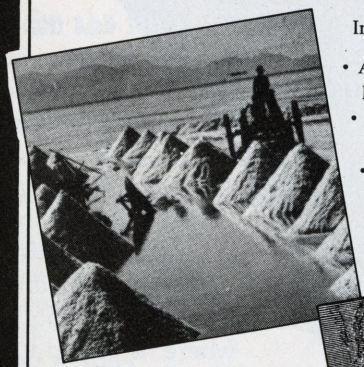

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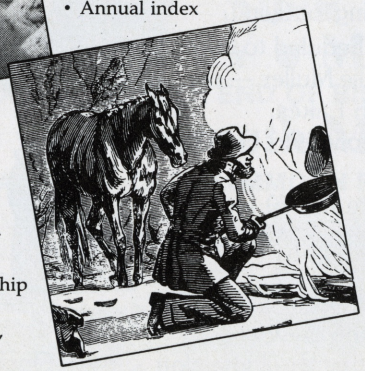

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made to land. This, too, was aborted when the basket hit a tree and tipped slightly.

Renee' and Nerolie knew something strange was happening when they realized the basket was heading for the lakes area. But it wasn't until they lost radio contact after crossing the pass, that they knew something was really wrong.

Metcalf climbed to 12,000 feet, placing the balloon in the westerly jet stream. This would allow them to cross the Sierra safely. The temperature was at zero degrees and the wind was blowing 30 to 50 miles per hour. Everyone in the basket was cold, but the view was spectacular. The balloon floated in silence as crew and passengers enjoyed breathtaking views of Mount Banner, Mount Ritter and the Minarets. They could see as far north as Yosemite and as far south as Mount Whitney. "It was gorgeous," says Renee', "Absolutely gorgeous. We took a couple of photographs, but it was too cold for the camera."

Twenty-five miles west of Mammoth, Metcalf considered setting the balloon down at a site named, appropriately, Balloon Dome. Surveying the area, he asked his passengers, "Do you girls hike?" Renee' and Nerolie, peering down at several thousand acres of snow-covered wilderness, replied, "No!" So they flew on.

"We had a lot of confidence in Dave," Renee' recalls. "We could tell that this was a new situation for him, but both he and Joe were very calm. I remember how at one point, he stopped looking at the gauges because he was so worried about the altitude. But, we never felt like he was losing control."

Back at Mammoth, a bewildered ground crew began searching the Lakes Basin for the balloon. Shortly before losing radio contact, Metcalf had radioed his intention to land in the Lakes Basin. Little could they know where their search would take them.

Our four reluctant aviators were now about two hours into their flight. They followed the San

Joaquin River southwest, passing between Mount Tom and the San Joaquin mines, and then passing Mammoth Pool Reservior, they headed toward Shaver Lake. Metcalf was concerned about finding a suitable landing site since a 70 foot balloon traveling at high speed needs a lot of space to set down.

The ground crew, still searching the Lakes Basin, informed the Forest Service and FFA Flight Service that they had somehow 'mislaid' a balloon.

Just north of Shaver Lake, Metcalf spotted what appeared to be a deserted logging camp — exactly the kind of landing site he had hoped to find. On a meadow, surrounded by tall pine trees, Metcalf brought the balloon down for a bumpy, but safe landing. The balloon draped itself in a pine tree and the basket came to a stop on it's side. The reluctant aviators, who had just managed to break a ballooning record, emerged from the basket without a scratch and very much relieved. The balloon suffered a few, easily repairable tears and there was enough fuel left for another twenty minutes of flying.

The balloon was laid out on the ground for easy visibility from the air in case a search and rescue effort had been mounted. Metcalf and Juneau had no idea what action had been taken by their ground crew since they had lost radio contact after crossing Mammoth Pass.

The downed balloonists walked a quarter mile to the logging camp where they found a truck with a full tank of gas and keys in the ignition. "It was the most incredible luck," Renne' remembers, "A truck with keys. It was wierd. Just too lucky!"

They drove the truck fifteen miles to Big Creek and from a phone booth in front of the town's only store, they called the Mono County Sheriff's office. The Sheriff contacted the ground crew, who were still searching the Lakes Basin area, and close to calling for a full scale search and rescue effort.

The owner of the Big Creek General Store drove the balloonists back out to the logging camp where they returned the borrowed truck, picked up the balloon and basket, and then drove to Shaver Lake. After checking into a Shaver Lake motel, they went to sleep only to be awakened at 2:30 A.M. by an exhausted ground crew.

In spite of the somewhat flukey success of the first trans-Sierra balloon flight, the High Sierra Ballooning Company has no immediate plans to introduce this excursion into their regular services. Pilot Dave Metcalf would rather not attempt another trans-Sierra crossing without proper planning, and as for the ground crew . . . they would prefer the balloon stay on the east side of the Sierra - unless there was an easterly wind the next day so the flight crew could return under their own power! □

Tim Snyder Photo

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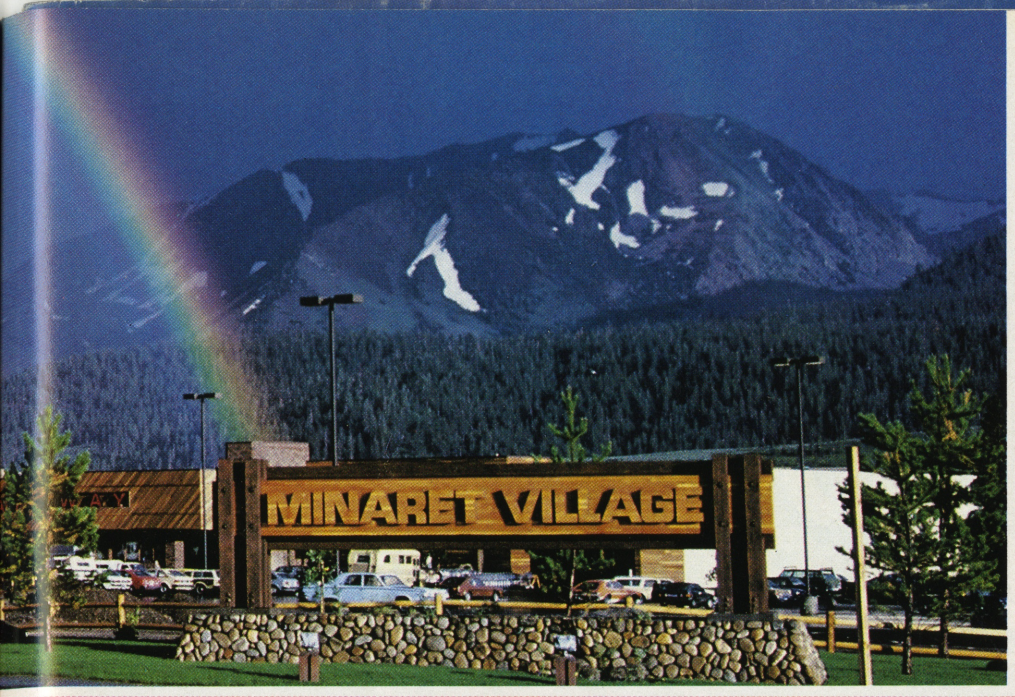

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WILDLIFE in *Watercolor*

The Art of Betty Graves

By Cese McGowan

We were sitting around the glass table in the deepening green evening, swatting mosquitoes and telling tales. Betty Graves is a good-looking, medium sized woman: laughing, generous and extra intense. She's a very capable person, and tough enough so you know the generosity is intentional. Graves is a well-known Western wildlife artist, but after seeing the banks of flowers that surround her house, and the huge vegetable garden colonized from the vacant lot across the street, I wonder out loud where she finds the time to paint.

9 x 12 Mr. & Mrs. J. Archer Collection

"It's hard in the springtime," she says. "I have to do without sleep."

We are interrupted by three neighborhood children, and she loads them down with vegetables from the garden and fresh caught trout. "They told me there are twelve in the family, so I give 'em all I can when they come visit me." She leans close, pointing a finger at my chest, and whispers her secret: "That's the fun of it! To have it," and she pauses a moment for effect, "then to give it to someone else!" Big, husky laugh.

We return to the table, and I ask Graves about her childhood.

Not so long ago, she tells me, Los Angeles was a city of neighborhoods, of long summer evenings playing kick the can, and houses with unlocked doors. There were mornings spent beside her grandmother in the garden (there was always a garden," she says), afternoons playing at the beach or fishing from the pier, and in the evenings her dad would make up hilarious stories for Betty and her brother Stan and grab up a pencil to draw the picture that couldn't quite be described in words.

The family's history has the sound of a Western epic: the grandfather, a Colorado

continued on page 78

16 x 20 *Mr. & Mrs. C. Langdon Collection*

16 x 20 Oil *Private Collection*

12 x 16 *Mr. & Mrs. Carl Pierce Collection*

cattleman who lost his life in a blizzard; the grandmother, who turned her back on winter and moved the family to California; their son, a child of the new West, who went to work creating fantasy for the great motion picture studios.

Betty's father worked in the special effects departments of 20th Century Fox and RKO from 1930 to 1965, an incredibly exciting and colorful period in American film, but he left it all behind every evening when he walked through the door to the white frame house near Hollywood.

"My father wasn't impressed with Hollywood glamour," Graves says. 'His job, that he worked in the movies, meant nothing to us."

He had inherited his father's love of big spaces with few people, and every chance they had, the family came to the Owens Valley. "When the studio was on strike, when there was a layofff, on all our vacations, we'd all pack up and move here," Graves recalls. "During the war we rode streetcars to save our gas coupons for the trip."

The family found beauty in nature, not inside a darkened movie theatre. To Betty, the magic was at hand: a glittering trout beneath the lens of clear water; a hummingbird, pausing to sup at one, then another of the crimson blossoms in their garden. And there was a special kind of magic that flowed from her father's pencil, making something where there had been nothing before, and showing in a way that words cannot the essence of a thing.

Graves started doing it too: drawing all the time. Drawing and daydreaming, drawing all over the margins of her homework, drawing when she should have been studying. Her teachers praised her, and always displayed her work, but criticized her use of color, "something," she laughs, "that critics still do."

She married and had two sons, Jim and Gary Shallcross, and in 1963, now married to tall, handsome Robert Graves, once again started making the pilgrimage to the Owens Valley. "We kept moving: L.A., Long Beach, Orange County, but it kept getting busier, busier." Every Friday they'd drive to the Owens Valley, and every Sunday, Betty would cry all the way back home.

So in the winter of 1969-1970 Betty and Bob Graves quit their jobs, sold everything and, with Bob's sons Scott and Bobby, moved to the Hill Ranch, tucked into a crevice of the White Mountains, 23 miles from Bishop. The father's dream came true for his daughter.

"It took us six months to make

Betty Graves in a recent photo.

the old buildings livable," she tells me. "Well, livable for us. There were coyotes and owls living there when we arrived." But the Graves had found their home.

"We had a big garden," she recalls, "and goats, pigs, chickens and horses. We even had a pet crow and a pet magpie that we taught to talk, and they'd chatter to each other and call each other's names." Though they've moved several times since then, the Graves have never left the valley, and now live in Bishop.

Graves neglected her drawing for years while she raised a family, and came back to it through china painting, which she took up as a hobby in 1961. A year or so later, she started painting wildlife miniatures on porcelain. The next year found her selling these miniatures at the Death Valley Art Show. By the following year, however, the show had been reorganized, and Graves' work was rejected. "Craft," they said. "Not fine art."

It was the impetus Graves needed. "I'm going to teach myself to paint," she told her husband, "and I'm going to come back here and have my work accepted."

In 1983, 1984, and 1985, Betty Graves' watercolors won first prize at the prestigious Death Valley show. She placed paintings with a number of galleries, though she has recently withdrawn from her associations with all but a gallery in Carmel, one in Klamath Falls, Oregon, and two in Southern California, because she can't keep them supplied.

Graves prefers to work with watercolors, though her paintings, often employing a dark background with the subject awash in light, have been compared to old world oils. They sparkle with realism, immediately drawing the eye to the center of interest, while the darker, softly rendered background allows the gaze to move around the painting before returning to the central figure.

She does not limit herself to one style. A recent work featuring a pair of Gambel's quail shows them against a brilliant wash of color, luminous as sunrise. It is clear that each of her paintings has been thoughtfully conceived, and that they are not merely an excuse to depict wildlife.

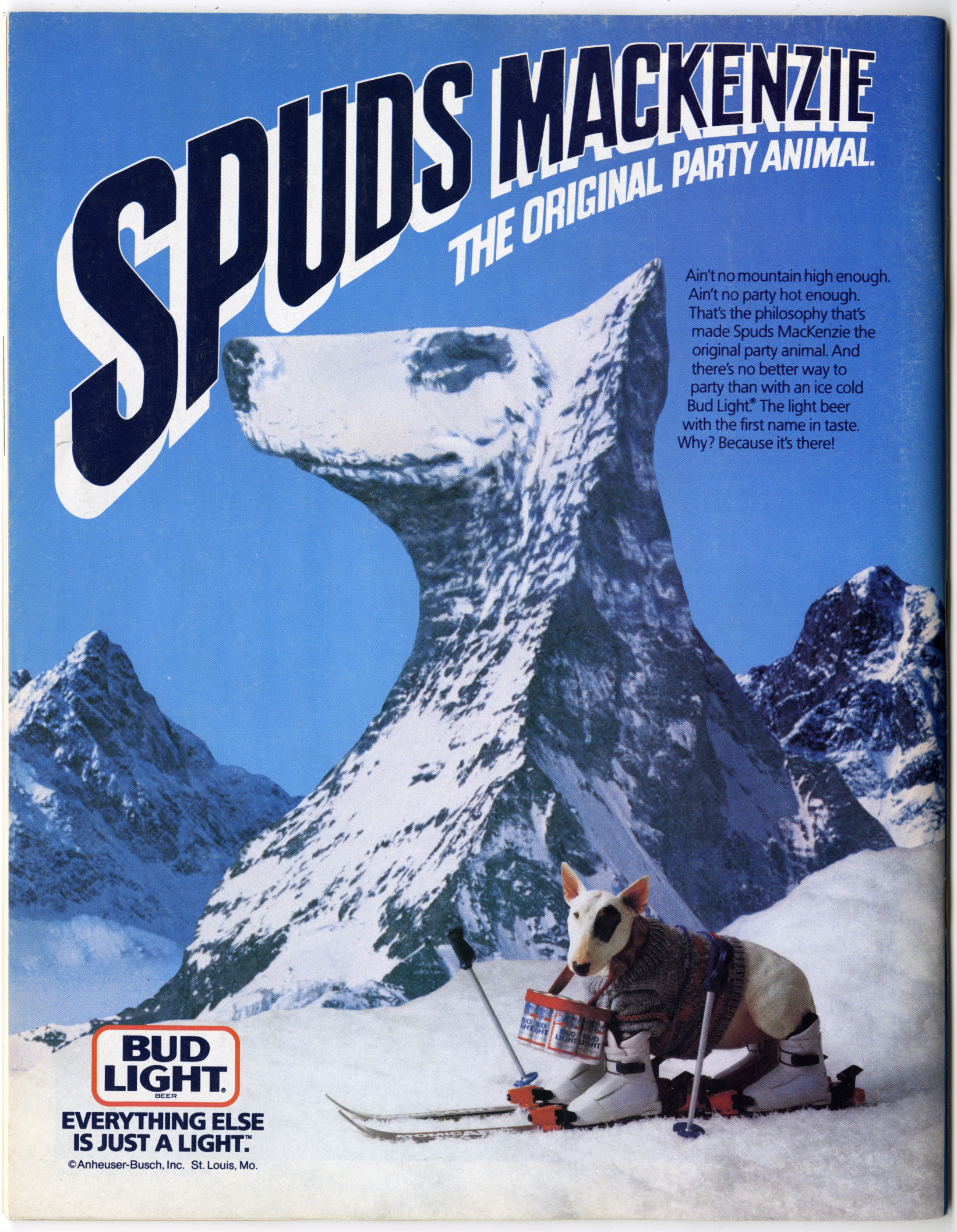
Graves admits that she's heavily influenced by her surroundings, but also acknowledges a particular point of view. She regards her wild subjects with great respect, and feels a curious closeness to them. In the hours spent before the easel, she comes to know them very well.

"I want to project this onto the canvas," Graves says. "And sometimes, when people see my paintings, they get the same feeling. They are there."

Graves paints to describe what she sees with that intimate, penetrating observation of the artist. "Each time I sit down to paint, I think, 'Can I pull it off?' Each time, I'm trying to express the essence of all the beauty I see." She flashes that conspiratorial grin: "You know, to have it, then to give it to someone else!" □

Cathedral Peak, Yosemite

Photo by Michael Pope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